

FRANK MERRIWELL'S SECRET



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Frank Merriwell's Secret

BY

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"Frank Merriwell's Schooldays," "Frank Merriwell's Trip West,"
"Frank Merriwell's Chums," "Frank Merriwell's Foes,"
"Frank Merriwell Down South," etc.

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Frank Merriwell's Secret

FRANK MERRIWELL'S SECRET.

CHAPTER I.

AN AFFAIR OF THE HEART.

Frank Merriwell, the all-round athlete of Yale, whose integrity and honest endeavor in the path of right and justice had made for him a host of friends, and as many enemies, had become involved in "an affair of the heart." So far as Merriwell was concerned, it had been brought about entirely unwittingly.

It is a very fine thing for a young man to stop a runaway horse and save the life of a young girl—that's what Merriwell did. But when the young girl afterward sets the young man up as "her hero," complications are likely to follow—that's what Winnie Lee did.

And then Inza Burrage came to New Haven for a visit. Frank and Inza had been friends at Fardale when Frank was a student at the military academy. Frank had told Winnie all about Inza, and their friendship. At first Winnie had been jealous, but she had put this feeling aside until Inza herself put in an appearance at New Haven. Then, when Inza had gone away, and the boys had pronounced her a "peach," and spoke of her as Merry's "best girl," all her old jealousy returned, and she resolved to use her arts to "cut out" Inza.

Immediately Winnie seemed to forget there was such a person in the world as Frank Merriwell, and she took care to bestow her sweetest smiles on the very fellows Merry most disliked.

Among all the fellows with whom Frank was not particularly friendly, Winnie selected Walter Gordan as the one on whom she would bestow her sweetest smiles.

It was shortly after Inza's departure that Merry was invited to a party. He found Jack Diamond had also received an invitation, and the two went together.

As they were starting out, they were joined by Walter Gordan, much to Jack's disgust.

"Ah, fellows," called Walter, who was bundled to the ears, "going to the party? So am I. We'll all go along together."

Merriwell said nothing, but Diamond muttered something under his breath.

"It's jolly cold to-night, isn't it?" said Walter, attempting to strike up a conversation.

"This is good, bracing air," said Merriwell.

"Oh, say! it's altogether too bracing. I don't like cold weather. I hate snow. It's time for snow. Wonder why we haven't had any yet? Ground ought to be covered now."

Diamond and Merriwell walked on without speaking. Gordan kept at Merriwell's side, and did not seem at all discouraged by his reception.

"I'd like to go South this winter," he said. "Spent one winter in Florida. Ever been there, Merry?"

"Yes."

"Oh, yes, so you have. I know about that, come to think of it."

"Eh—you do?"

"Sure."

"Well, how in——"

Frank stopped short. He had thought of asking Gordan how he knew so much, but what was the use? It was likely some fellow who did know had told Walter.

"I should think you'd like to go South this winter,

Merry," Gordan said. "At least, I should think you'd like to go as far South as Virginia."

"Eh? What do you mean?"

"Oh, nothing, nothing!" answered Walter, with a knowing laugh; "but you are a great fellow for the girls, Merriwell—you cut ice with them all. Same one was in Florida when you were there, I believe."

There was something in Gordan's manner that aggravated Frank so much that he longed to catch the fellow by the collar and shake him, but, with his usual coolness, he held himself in check.

"You talk in enigmas," he declared. "What do you mean by saying the same one was in Florida?"

"Same girl, of course."

"Same girl as what?"

"Ha, ha, ha! I don't wonder you can't remember them all. Why, same girl that was in Virginia as you were returning from your trip across the continent."

Elsie Bellwood! Gordan knew about her. That was plain enough, and again Frank wondered how the fellow obtained his information.

Again Diamond muttered something under his breath, but Gordan rattled on:

"There are not many fellows who can have so many girls and keep them all. You must work it pretty slick, Merry. It must keep you lying pretty near all the time."

"Look here, Gordan!" said Frank, sharply, "you are getting somewhat offensive."

"Oh, am I? Beg pardon. Mustn't be so touchy, old man; but the truth does sting sometimes, doesn't it?"

"If the truth were told about you, you'd have to get out of college, my fine fellow," growled Diamond, unable to keep silent longer.

"There are others, my boy," returned Gordan, with nonchalance. "I'm not the only dumpling in the soup."

But say, I'm just jollying. There's no reason why you chaps should get nifty. Can't you stand anything? Everybody knows Merriwell is a masher."

Frank's hand fell on Gordan's shoulder.

"Look here!" he said, sharply; "I want you to understand that I distinctly object to being called a masher."

"Oh!"

"Yes. I am not a masher, and I do not lie to anybody. Your language is altogether too insolent."

"Punch him!" growled Diamond.

Gordan cringed. He had not thought to carry the thing far enough to get himself into trouble, although he had taken delight in prodding Merriwell.

"Hold on!" he exclaimed. "You must be tender to mind a little joking."

"Joking can be carried too far."

"You never seem to think so when you are horsing some other fellow. Can't you take a little when it comes your turn?"

"Confine yourself to the proper kind of jokes, and it will be all right. But you were not joking in this instance—you were sneering. I give you fair warning not to call me a masher again, for that is a title to which I object. That's all. You understand it, and there is no need of making any further talk about it."

His hand fell from Walter's shoulder, and they walked along in silence. Gordan realized he had reached the limit, and he kept still.

Jack Diamond was not at all satisfied. He had hoped Frank would punch Gordan, and he mentally resolved to do the job himself at the first opportunity.

CHAPTER II.

JEALOUS WINNIE.

Winnie Lee was at the party. Frank sought her for the very first dance, but she coolly said:

"You'll have to excuse me, Mr. Merriwell. I may not dance this evening."

"Oh, but you must dance once with me!" he exclaimed. She lifted her eyebrows.

"Indeed!" she returned, rather haughtily. "I had no idea you were my master!"

He looked at her in astonishment.

"What's the matter with you, Winnie?" he asked. "You are not like yourself. I don't know why you should treat me like this."

"I beg your pardon," she said, still more coldly. "There is Mr. Gordan. I wish to speak with him."

Then she abruptly left Frank.

"That's what I call a body blow!" he muttered, as he watched her hurrying to join Gordan. "It makes me feel like giving that cad a thump on the coco! It's plain he is getting in his fine work with her. Means to knock me out. Well, Winnie and I were simply the best of friends. If she desires to end our friendship, all right. There are a few other young ladies in New Haven society who may feel like smiling on me."

Still, he was cut deeply by having Winnie abandon him for a fellow like Gordan, and he flushed to the roots of his hair as Walter led her onto the floor for the first waltz.

"That's worse than a body blow!" he gasped; "it's plumb in the neck! Oh, my! how I would like to punch that fellow! I'll do it, too, if I continue to feel this way!"

As they whirled past him, Gordan gave Merriwell a triumphant grin, and that added to Frank's anger.

But Merry was right in thinking Winnie was not the only young lady in New Haven society who would seek his company. He, the famous athlete and football player, was not to be left to himself.

A bevy of laughing girls, every one of them pretty, descended on him, surrounded him, buttonholed him.

Then they began to fire compliments at him so fast that he was nearly overwhelmed. He gasped for breath.

"Girls, girls!" he weakly protested.

"Oh, my brother says you are a phenom!" gurgled one.

"Mine says you are a marvel!" declared another.

"And I saw you carry all those Harvard men over the line on your back in the game at Cambridge," said a third. "How could you do it?"

"And you dance so divinely!" exclaimed a fourth.

"Why aren't you dancing now?" they all cried together.

"To tell the truth, girls," laughed Frank, "I am waiting to see which one of you will ask me."

There was a moment of silence, and then every one of them asked him in the same breath.

"That won't do!" cried Frank, laughing more than ever. "I can't dance this dance with all of you. How are we going to settle it? Of course I'd like to dance with you all all the time, but——"

"We'll have to draw jackstraws for him," cried one laughing joker.

"I'll tell you what we can do," said another.

"Do!" cried the three.

"We can play a game of whist, eight points, for him. It will be such jolly fun! What do you say, girls?"

This proposition was received with great delight, and Frank was carried away to the card-room.

The game was played, with Frank for referee, and the prettiest girl of them all was the winner.

By the time the game was over the first waltz had ended, so it was agreed that they should take the next dance.

From that time on during the entire evening Frank was scarcely left to himself a moment. Plainly enough, he was the lion of the evening, and it was considered quite an honor to dance with him.

Frank gave Winnie Lee not the least attention, appearing as if he did not know there was such a person in existence. Not once did she catch him glancing in her direction.

Winnie flirted persistently with Gordan, making a desperate attempt to awaken some show of jealousy on Merriwell's part. She laughed at Walter's witless jokes and pretended to blush at his indelicate flattery. Any one not in the secret might have fancied she was deeply smitten by him.

Diamond saw all this.

"She's foolish if she thinks she can work Merry that way," he mentally observed. "She is finding two can play at that game, and Merry does it with the greater success. Sometimes she does look around to see what he is doing, but he acts as if he had never met her and did not know there was such a girl in the world. Oh, he's an artist in that line when he gets started. I can't do the trick, for I become angry and show my jealousy."

At last Winnie approached Jack. Diamond saw her coming.

"She's beginning to cave in," he thought. "It's ten to one she's going to make an attempt to reach him through me."

He was right, but the attempt was of a different char-

acter than he anticipated, for Winnie said not a few cutting and scornful things about Frank.

Jack was indignant, and defended his friend to the best of his ability.

That, however, was just what Winnie wanted, but he had not tact enough to see it. It gave her an opportunity to get in her most telling blows, and she did so.

At last Diamond opened up in earnest, and it did not require many words for him to express his opinion of Walter Gordan.

Then she pretended to get indignant, and away she went to dance with Walter.

When Diamond told Frank, the latter simply laughed, and said :

"You played into her hands, old fellow. She told you all that stuff so you would report it to me. Even now she is watching, and she knows you have told me."

Then Frank fell to laughing more than ever, as if immensely amused by what Diamond had told him, and Winnie Lee believed her effort to touch him had been a failure.

Gordan was highly elated, for he fancied he had really got the advantage of Frank in one thing.

If Gordan could have known a few of the thoughts in Winnie's mind his self-conceit would have received a severe setback.

Finally Frank decided to leave. He went to the coat-room, and he was there alone when Winnie appeared at the door.

"Mr. Merriwell," she called, and she seemed strangely excited.

Frank turned sharply.

"Miss Lee."

He was perfectly calm and as cool as ice.

She hesitated, and then spoke quickly :

"Before you go, I must have a few words with you. I must not be seen speaking with you."

Frank was astonished. Just what it meant was more than he could understand, but he said:

"Where shall we go?"

"Follow me at a distance. Do not approach me if any other person is present."

He obeyed, and she found a curtained corner, where there was not much chance that they would be seen. Behind the curtains they sat down on a settee.

There was a moment of silence.

"We can talk here without being seen or overheard," said Frank, very quietly.

"Yes," she said. "I have something to tell you."

"I am listening," said Frank.

"You have an enemy."

"Several of them."

"But one in particular."

"I am not sure I know which one you mean."

"A freshman."

"Mason?"

"Yes, that is his name."

"How do you know anything of him?"

"Never mind that. I do know, and I know that he means to do you harm."

"Is this what you wish to tell me?"

"That and more. He will try to injure you to-night."

"Indeed? How is he going about it?"

"While you are here at this party, he and some of his friends will enter your room."

"Really? I'd like to know how they are going to do it."

"Some fellow has taken an impression of your door key, and they have had a key made to fit the lock."

Frank's interest grew.

"That is worth knowing. But what are they going to do in my room?"

"Wait for you."

"Ah! And when I return—what will they do then?"

"Wait till you have gone to bed and to sleep, if you do not discover them."

"And then—what?"

"I don't know what they mean to do to you, but I do know they mean you no good. The one who told me seemed to think it all a great joke, but I think they intend to hurt you. That is why I wished to speak to you, and I did not wish to be seen for fear it would be suspected that I had told you."

"It was very kind of you," said Frank, after a moment of silence. "I assure you that I fully appreciate it, Miss Lee."

She drew back.

"Don't mention it," came chillingly from her lips. "I would have done as much for any other fellow."

"It is more than I expected you would do for me."

"More than you had a right to expect, perhaps."

"Winnie, why——"

"Miss Lee, if you please."

"Oh, very well," he said, with the utmost seriousness; "Miss Lee it shall be hereafter—forever. You have chosen that it should be so; I am not to blame. I thank you, Miss Lee, for the information you have given me, and you may be sure I shall do my best to entertain my enemies who are seeking to trap me to-night."

Then there was a silence. Some way his hand touched hers, but she drew back quickly.

"No more drives, no more theatres, no more pleasant evenings together," he repeated, slowly. "All that is over now. You have decided it. I trust you will never regret your decision."

"I shall not," she said, coldly—so coldly that he was astonished.

He had expected that she would melt at last, but now he understood that he hoped in vain. It was plain that she was determined, and she did not mean that anything should alter that determination.

"Very well," he repeated again, rising to his feet. "Once more I thank you. I would warn you of a certain person, but were I to do so, you would think it spite and jealousy, so I will remain silent."

"You need not trouble yourself, Mr. Merriwell. I am quite capable of taking care of myself. Go now, so we may not be seen coming from behind these curtains."

He left her, without another word, for he felt that silence would be far more effective than words just then.

Without delay, he sought Jack Diamond.

"Any more dances engaged, old man?" he asked.

"No."

"Get your hat and coat. I want you to come with me."

"What's up?"

"There's blood on the moon."

"As the moon is full, it must have fallen down and hurt itself," returned Jack, springing the first joke Frank had ever heard from his lips.

"Eh?" exclaimed Merry, in astonishment. "Have you been drinking? Never knew you to do anything like that before. You seem to be in a merry mood, old fellow. That is good. Come with me, and I will show you more fun than a whole barrel of monkeys. Oh, we won't do a thing—not a thing!"

CHAPTER III.

FRANK SECURES ASSISTANCE.

"Now," said Merriwell, as they were on their way to South Middle, "we want some paint."

"What?" exclaimed Jack.

"Red paint."

"Red paint? What for?"

"We are going to do a little decorating this evening, old fellow," laughed Frank. "If I can get the kind of paint I want we'll do some decorating that will not wash off easily."

Jack was more puzzled than ever.

"Look here!" he cried. "Let me into this. What sort of a racket is on the stocks?"

"I know where there are several savages who are on the warpath, but are not properly adorned with war paint," chuckled Merriwell. "I intend to see that they are adorned as they should be."

"Still I am in the dark."

"Never mind; you'll find out pretty soon. I am going to get that paint if I have to turn out every dealer in chemicals in New Haven. After those savages are adorned, they'll not need another coat for a week, and it will take sandpaper to get off the one we'll give them."

Frank knew where to get the stuff he desired, and soon he and Jack each had a package under their arm.

"How many savages do you expect to paint this evening?" asked the puzzled Virginian.

"Don't know. It all depends on how many of them we find on the warpath."

"Say, when are you going to let me into the game?"

"Right away. We've got to take Nagasaki along."

"The Jap?"

"Sure."

"What for?"

"He is a hypnotist, and we'll need him to put the savages under a spell."

"Will he do it?"

"He'll do anything for me."

"I'd like to know what sort of power you have over that Jap freshman. No one else can approach him or do anything with him, but he obeys you in everything."

"Little secret, old man."

"There is something uncanny about him. His mysterious power——"

"Simple hypnotism, that is all."

"But he seems able to use it on anybody. All he has to do is look at them and wave his hand, and they crawl or stand on their heads, as he may tell them. No wonder the fellows shun him."

"No one would have known of his power if he had not been forced to use it in his own defense. He was being hazed right and left, and, getting tired of that, he started in hazing the hazers. He would hypnotize them and then make them do all sorts of ridiculous things, but he never harmed anybody."

"He tried to kill Harris."

"Harris was to blame. He provoked Nagasaki till the Jap completely lost control of his passions."

"Well, I don't care about monkeying with Matso Nagasaki much. I don't mind going along with you, but I would not enter his room with any other fellow in college."

To Nagasaki's room they went. The Jap was a hard student, for he acquired knowledge slowly, although he

never forgot anything once it was learned. He was just preparing to go to bed when Frank knocked on his door.

"Who's there?" called the Jap, without unbolting the door.

"Frank Merriwell. I want to see you right away. Let me in."

"Not to-night. Go away. I will see you to-morrow."

"To-morrow will not do. I must see you now."

After a pause, the door was unbolted, and Nagasaki surlily called:

"Come in."

The boys entered.

Nagasaki's room was of the plainest sort. It was not decorated, nor did it contain any chairs. There were rugs on the floor. When Nagasaki wished to sit down he sat on one of these rugs.

Frank and Jack stood up. Nagasaki faced them and asked what they wanted.

"I want you to help me to-night, Matso," said Frank. "There are several fellows in my room who are waiting for me to return. They had a key made to fit my door, and have sneaked in there. It is their plan to lay low till after I get to bed and go to sleep. Then they mean to capture me. What they mean to do after that I can't tell, but it is certain they intend to raise merry thunder with me."

"How you find all this out?" asked Matso.

"It came to me straight enough. I know it is true."

"What you do?"

"I am going to capture those fellows and decorate them?"

"How decorate?"

"With paint; we have it here; it won't wash off. We will mark them so the whole college will know them to-morrow."

Something like the ghost of a grin came to the face of the little Jap.

"You turn the joke," he said. "That good trick. What you want of me?"

"I want you to go along and help me. You are to make the fellows powerless while I get in my fine work with the paint brush."

"Can't do that."

"Why not?"

"When I am let alone, I let others alone."

"That's all right, Nagasaki; but I have befriended you, and now it is your turn to give me a lift."

As he said this, Merriwell made a peculiar sign with his fingers. The Jap saw the movement.

"All right; I will go with you," he said.

They soon reached Frank's room.

"Walk right in, fellows," said Frank, loudly, as he unlocked the door of his room. "I will strike a light directly."

Diamond and Nagasaki entered, stepping heavily, and trying to make it appear as if there were four or five of them, instead of two.

Frank closed and locked the door. Then he found a match and lighted his student's lamp.

"Sit down," he invited. "We are alone. As I was telling you, this Hock Mason is the easiest thing I ever went up against. I don't see where he got his reputation. He is fruit for anybody that can scrap a little bit."

"And he runs with a snide crowd," said Diamond, leaning on the back of a chair. "Gordan, Harris and those fellows are all sneaks. Why, it would be just like them, Frank, to sneak into your room some night when you were out and try to get the best of you when you came back."

"If they ever try that trick, they'll wish they hadn't,"

said Frank. "I carry a revolver, and I would not hesitate to shoot one of them down. It would be a matter of self-defense. Any one has a right to shoot a burglar found in his sleeping-room."

All this was said for effect.

Frank began to look around, without seeming to do so. It was not long before he discovered that one of his enemies was hidden beneath the couch.

Merry felt certain the others were in the next room, as the couch was the only thing that could hide one of them in that room. Probably at least two of them were under the bed.

Frank took down a cane and asked Jack how he liked it. Then he fixed a pin to the end of the cane and sat down on the couch. As he chatted he carelessly thrust the cane under the couch. It touched something, and Merry mercilessly rammed the pin home.

There was a cry and an upheaval. The fellow under the couch had not been able to remain silent.

"Hello!" called Frank, springing to his feet. "Come out. I have caught a burglar, and my revolver is ready for use. Come out, fellow, or I'll send a few bullets under there."

"Don't shoot!" called a faint voice. "I'll come out."

Then Walter Gordan crawled from under the couch!

"Well," said Merriwell, coolly, "you must have hustled to get here. How did you do it?"

Walter tried to force a laugh.

"Oh, I came right along," he said, huskily. "I—I found your door unlocked, and so I—I—came in."

"I see you did. What were you doing under that couch? Were you looking for anything?"

"Ha, ha! Nun—no—oh, no! Just got under there for a—a little joke. That's all."

"You'll find it the worst joke you ever tried to play," declared Diamond, fiercely.

Gordan actually trembled.

"Oh, come!" he cried. "You wouldn't hurt a fellow for trying to—a—ah—to have a little fun?"

"No, we won't hurt you," said Frank; "but I am going to have some fun myself. Mr. Gordan, my friend, Matso Nagasaki. Take a good look at him."

Gordan looked at the Jap. Nagasaki was standing. He gazed fairly into Gordan's eyes, made a few slow moves with his hands, and then said:

"You must do as I say. You can't help it. Stand with your back to the wall there."

Mechanically Gordan obeyed. He seemed powerless to do anything else.

"He is yours," said the hypnotist. "He will stay there till I tell him to move."

Frank picked up a small lamp, which he lighted.

"Come," he whispered. "The others must be in the bedroom."

They followed him into the room. He had his revolver in his hand. Pointing the weapon toward the bed, he said:

"Now, gentlemen, I will prove to you my claim that a revolver of this bore will send a bullet through the bed and into the floor beneath it. That will end the dispute. I shall fire three shots downward through the bed, and I'll bet you anything that all three bullets will penetrate the floor under the bed. Ready, now——"

"Stop!" called a frightened voice from beneath the bed. "Don't shoot; you will hit us!"

Frank laughed outright.

"So there is another burglar here," he said. "Come out, sir, and show yourself."

Sport Harris and a freshman by the name of Pooler came crawling forth.

As soon as they appeared Nagasaki began the work of hypnotizing them, and they were soon under his control. His power was something marvelous, and it was not remarkable that it was thought by the other students that there was something uncanny about him.

When Harris and Pooler were on their feet, Frank faced the clothespress.

"It is possible there are still others around," he said. "If any person is behind that door, he had better come forth, for when I have counted three, I shall fire through the door."

Then he began to count:

"One!"

Silence.

"Two!"

Silence still.

"Th——"

The door opened quickly, and Hock Mason came out, his face pale and contorted with rage. He looked as if he longed to leap at Frank's throat, but the revolver was pointed straight at him, and Frank advised him not to try it.

Nagasaki worked hard to hypnotize Mason. The freshman bully fought against the spell, and the perspiration fairly poured from the face of the Jap before he conquered.

But conquer he finally did, and then the three were marched into the other room and stood in a line beside Gordan, with their backs to the wall.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Frank Merriwell laughed merrily as he surveyed his captives.

"Take a good look at them, fellows," he directed. "Aren't they birds? They came here to have fun with me to-night."

The hypnotized students seemed to realize what was being said, but they remained rigid and helpless, with their backs against the wall.

"You have found out who your enemies are, Merry," said Diamond.

"Yes, and I am going to mark them all so I'll know them to-morrow—so everybody will know them. Matso, direct them to strip off their clothes to the waist."

The Jap did so, and it was a ludicrous spectacle to see those four captives obeying his order.

Frank prepared the paint which he had obtained.

"Now, my giddy warriors," he said, when they were stripped to the waist, "I am going to decorate you each with a coat of war paint. It will go on easy, and it will wear off in time, but you will not be able to wash it off in a hurry."

The captives showed signs of rage, but still they were helpless. Nagasaki was watching them all, and now and then he would make a few mysterious passes before their eyes.

Frank dipped the brush into the paint. He approached Gordan.

"My dear boy," he said, "I will be as artistic as possible with you. You shall look like a Pawnee brave."

Then he began to dash on the paint profusely. Jack Diamond regarded the work with great satisfaction.

"Put it on thick, Merry," he advised. "Give them some work to get the stuff off."

"Don't worry," laughed Frank. "I'll make it thick enough, and it will not come off in a hurry."

Breasts, backs and arms of all four he daubed with the paint, which dried with remarkable quickness.

Then he came to the faces of the captives.

"I'll put my mark on you all," he said. "You will carry it for several days."

On the right cheek of each he painted an "F," and on the left cheek he made an "M."

"F. M.," he said. "There is not a man at Yale who does not know that stands for Frank Merriwell. You will carry my mark for some time."

He drew other fanciful designs on their faces with the paint, and Jack Diamond was forced to smile with grim satisfaction. Nagasaki looked on stolidly.

When the task was completed, Frank bade them put on their clothes. They did not make a move to obey him, however. At the command of the Jap they resumed the garments they had taken off.

Frank made a speech to them. He struck a mock heroic attitude, and addressed them as "mighty warriors." He caused Diamond to smile still more.

At last, he gave Nagasaki his instructions. The Jap ordered them to go to their rooms and to sleep. When they awoke in the morning they were to be in their normal condition.

Frank opened the door, and mockingly bade them good-night as they filed out of the room.

CHAPTER IV.

WHAT FOLLOWED.

A number of juniors had gathered at the fence despite the cutting wind which swept across the campus. In their midst was Danny Griswold, talking excitedly and laughing tumultuously.

"My, my!" cried the little fellow. "I've heard all about it! I know how it happened. Oh, my, my! It's the best thing Merriwell ever did. Branded all four of them—marked them with some kind of paint that they can't wash off. Not one of them appeared at chapel this morning. They would have been guyyed to death. He put his initials on their faces—'F. M.' They look like Indians in war paint. He, he, he! They will be jollied to death."

"Well, I don't understand how he captured all four of them," said Charlie Creighton, eagerly. "Such a thing seems impossible."

"That's because you do not yet know what Frank Merriwell can do," said Bruce Browning.

"But Mason, the bully, was one of them!" exclaimed Bandy Robinson.

"And it's a corker on Mason," cried Griswold. "If that doesn't cook him, I don't know what will."

"How was it—how did he do it?" persisted Creighton.

"Caught them all in his room and held them up while he painted them. They say he made them strip to the waist, and he has covered them with paint."

"Well, I am willing to admit I don't understand how he could do it," said Ben Halliday.

"Held them under the muzzle of a revolver, and they didn't dare do a thing."

"Ridiculous!"

"But he did it, I tell you! Diamond was with him—they did it together."

"What were those fellows doing in his room?"

"They had put up some kind of a job on him, and he turned the tables. It was the slickest trick ever done."

"They say two juniors were in it," put in Ben Halliday.

"Yes, Sport Harris and Walter Gordan. You know they are both down on Merriwell."

"Well, that fellow is a dandy! I should think Hock Mason would feel like crawling into a hole and pulling the hole in after him."

"He has not been seen outside his room to-day, and he's sent to the drug store for all sorts of stuff to take the paint off. He swears he will murder Merriwell. Ha, ha, ha!"

"Boys," laughed Halliday, "I really believe Merriwell will cook the freshman bully. I didn't think he could do it, but I have changed my mind."

When it became generally known what had happened it was the talk of the college. The appearance of Merriwell was the signal for a score of fellows to crowd around him and ask him all sorts of questions.

Frank told the whole story, with the exception of betraying the manner in which he received the warning that his enemies had set a trap for him. He explained how Nagasaki had aided him in handling the four plotters.

His story produced shouts of laughter. Then it was decided to pull the "decorated" lads out and place them on exhibition. Harris, Gordan and Pooler were assailed in their rooms, they were dragged forth before a jeering, laughing mob of students.

Never did three fellows look more ashamed and disgusted.

Their faces showed how they had struggled to scrub

off the paint. Everybody guyed them. Everybody joined in heaping ridicule upon them.

Harris ground his teeth while he looked as if he longed to kill somebody. Gordan was utterly crushed, and Pooler tried to bluff it off by pretended nonchalance.

Hock Mason alone was not dragged out of his room. They went up for him, but he refused to unlock his door, and he shouted at them that he was armed with a baseball bat and would brain the first man who tried to enter.

They contented themselves by firing volleys of ridicule through the door and then went away.

Harris had thought of running away and staying away till he could get the paint off, but it was too late for that. Everybody knew it, and he resolved to remain and face it out.

All speculated in the manner in which Mason would carry it off. Of course he was furious, but what could he do? "There'll be an awful fight between that fellow and Merriwell when he does come out," said Robinson.

"And Merriwell will lick him," declared Halliday. "I am sure of it now."

"Then Mason's reign as a bully is over."

"Let us hope so."

Before night Mason had a doctor. This created a stir and further gossip. All wondered what it meant.

The following day Mason was taken away to the city hospital. Then it was said that he had a fever.

CHAPTER V.

A CHANGE OF HEART.

Hock Mason lay on a cot in the hospital. He was emaciated and pale. His eyes were large and staring, while the hand that lay on the spread was thin and bony.

"A gentleman from the college to see you," said the nurse. "He has been here every day to inquire for you, but this is the first day that the doctor would let him see you. Your fever has turned now, and you are coming out all right, so your friend can see you."

"My friend!" said Mason, weakly.

"Yes, he must be the best friend you have in the world, for no one but a true friend could have been so anxious about you."

"Is he the only one who has called?"

"Yes."

"I don't know who it can be. I did not know I had such a friend. I want to see him."

A few moments later Frank Merriwell came to the side of the cot. Mason stared up at him with his eyes larger and wilder than ever.

"You?" he huskily whispered.

"Yes," said Frank, sitting down beside the cot. "They tell me you are coming out all right, old man. I am glad."

Then Hock Mason's eyes filled with tears, and he turned his face away to hide them.

"I am afraid I was in some way to blame for this," said Frank, his voice low and sincere. "It has worried me, Mason. If you had died, I'd never forgiven myself."

Still Mason kept his face turned away and remained silent. His heart was filled with wonder and a new sen-

sation he had never before experienced. It was swelling with an emotion Mason did not understand.

"I don't think you really meant me any harm," Frank went on, "and the way I got back at you was altogether too steep. It——"

"It served me right!" growled Hock Mason, still with his face averted.

"I don't know, but it was pretty rough."

"Rot! I meant to take you out of that room and carry you somewhere that we could fight it out and I could lick you without being interrupted. I meant to mark your face worse than you marked mine. It wasn't what I deserved! You should have used me worse, Merriwell!"

"Well, old man, it's all over now, and the nurse tells me you are coming around finely. You'll be in fighting trim again before long, and then——"

Mason turned over and showed his face wet with tears.

"I'll never fight again!" he passionately declared. "I am done with it! Since I have been sick I've thought it all over, and, for the first time, I have seen what a big brute I was becoming. I began to realize I didn't have a true friend in the world, and it made me sick at heart. I would have given anything for one real friend, but I realized that I would not be missed from old Yale if I died. I knew lots of fellows would be glad of it. Then I began to hate myself, and I swore I would be a different fellow if I ever got well. I am going to try to keep my oath."

Merriwell was surprised.

"Old fellow," he said, earnestly, "I hope you will stick to that. You have a magnificent physique, and there is no reason why you should not be popular. If you go into athletics, you will become a second Hikok, and Yale will be proud of you."

A light came to the face of the lad in an instant.

"Do you really believe that?" he asked.

"Sure."

"And do you think the fellows will have anything to do with me?"

"Of course they will."

"I don't know. I must be the most unpopular man at Yale."

"You can overcome that."

"How?"

"I will help you."

"You?"

"Yes."

"In what way?"

"I'll show them that I am your friend, and——"

"Merriwell, would you do that—would you dare?"

"Why not? You may depend on me, Mason."

Hock was silent again, looking long and steadily at Frank's face.

"Merriwell," he finally said, and his voice quivered, "you are the whitest fellow in the whole world. You are the only one who has taken the trouble to ask for me while I was sick. The others did not care. And you are the last one I could have fancied would care. I would give anything were I half the man you are!"

He was sincere; his face and his voice showed that. Merriwell was affected.

"Mason, you may become just as good a man as the best. We are what we make ourselves."

Hock reached out and took Frank's hand.

"Merriwell," he exclaimed, "if there is a change in me, you will be the cause of it. Hereafter I'll fight for you as long as I can stand up! If I become anything worthy, the credit will be due to you. God bless you, Merriwell!"

For a long while the pair talked the matter over.

When Frank went away Mason was in a decidedly thoughtful mood.

He was beginning to see matters in the right light.

Frank was equally thoughtful.

He had been greatly alarmed when it was reported that his enemy was down with a fever, and he was sincerely thankful that Mason was on the road to recovery.

"I guess I was a little too rough," he said to himself.

Day after day slipped by until winter was at hand.

Then Mason came from the hospital prepared to turn over a new leaf—if the other students would let him.

Frank had determined to stand by him. What this condition of affairs led to will be related in the next chapter.

CHAPTER VI.

A SENSATION ON THE CAMPUS.

There had been a light fall of snow, and a crowd of merry fellows were snowballing on the Yale campus. They laughed and shouted as they pelted each other.

"There goes Browning!" exclaimed Bink Stubbs. "See me nail him!"

Then, straight as a bullet from a rifle, the snowball flew, striking the big fellow's cap, and knocking it from his head. Stubbs uttered a cry of triumph.

"Confound you!" called Browning, as he lazily picked up his cap. "If it wasn't for the trouble, I'd shake you out of your clothes."

"You can't do it, you know," tauntingly sang Stubbs.

"Can't? Why not?"

"Can't catch me. You're so slow you can't catch a cold."

"I'll catch you some time," said Browning, brushing the snow off his cap and leaning up against a tree; "and when I do, there'll be a funeral in your family."

This brought another shout of laughter from the little fellow, and he let another snowball fly at Bruce.

Being too lazy to dodge it, Browning put up his hands and caught it as if it were a baseball. Then, with astonishing energy, for him, he threw it back.

Stubbs dodged and avoided the snowball, which flew past and struck a big freshman in the side of the head, nearly knocking him down.

"Hock Mason!" gasped Stubbs. "Now there'll be a fight!"

But, to the astonishment of all who saw it, Mason

showed not the slightest inclination to fight. He wiped off the snow with his handkerchief, grinned a bit, and said:

"That was a pretty good shot. Plugged my ear so I won't be able to hear for a week. I'd like to snowball with you fellows, but I don't dare try it."

Then he walked away.

Everybody stopped throwing snowballs and stared after him, as if unable to believe what they had seen and heard.

"Jee whiz!" gasped Bink Stubbs. "Is this some sweet, sweet dream? He wasn't even ruffled."

Stubbs, Halliday, Rattleton and Browning quickly came together, staring after the retreating form of the huge freshman.

"Did you hear it? Did you see it?" spluttered Rattleton. "Why, he didn't even stuss at Cubbs—I mean cuss at Stubbs."

"And he grinned!" grunted Browning—"grinned as he was digging snow out of his ear!"

"Thought he'd come after me," admitted Stubbs. "Was ready to light out lively."

"Tell you what!" cried Halliday.

"Tell us!" exclaimed the others.

"I believe Merriwell has cooked him."

"Can't be possible. He wouldn't give up like that."

"I believe he has, just as hard. You know Merry said he'd do it, and he wouldn't enter into a combine against Mason."

The boys remembered that Frank had persistently refused to have anything to do with a combination to tackle the freshman, and then had gone against Mason alone, saying that was the only way to teach him his place.

Was it possible the final encounter between the two had broken Hock Mason's spirit?

"Tell you what I heard," said Stubbs, mysteriously.

"Go ahead," urged Halliday.

"Heard Merriwell visited Mason at the hospital before Hock was out of bed. Something queer about that."

"Frank Merriwell is forever doing remarkable things," said Ben.

Browning nodded.

"I have traveled with him some," he said, "and I am never able to tell what sort of a move he will make in any game. He is the greatest enigma I ever struck."

"Look!" exclaimed Halliday. "There he is now. He's coming this way. He's met Mason. They have stopped to chat. Holy smoke! what a nerve Merriwell has! There's not another fellow in college would dare do the things he does. He is chummy with all alike. He cuts ice in all directions. Doesn't care a continental what people say about him, and still holds his head up all right. Why, that fellow is the biggest mystery at Yale, not even excepting Nagasaki, the Jap."

Tastily dressed in winter clothes, Frank was standing with his hands carelessly thrust into his pockets as he chatted with the freshman. No one could have suspected by their appearance that they had ever been anything but the very best of friends. Mason was not such a bad-looking fellow. He had a strong face and a big nose. Still, as the two stood there, for all of the superior size of the freshman, a good judge would have declared Merriwell the more manly in appearance.

There was something impressive about Frank's appearance. For all of his habitual carelessness, his every pose and gesture betrayed a reserve fund of energy and power that would stand by him well in any trying situation.

Although jovial and bubbling with good humor, his merry eyes could blaze with indignation and his handsome face could darken like a stormcloud.

Frank detested fighting, as he detested everything that

is low, but he believed that, as a rule, the best way to avoid a fight is to boldly face an enemy.

Halliday, Stubbs, Browning and Rattleton watched with some interest the former enemies who stood talking earnestly.

"Jove!" exclaimed Ben. "Merry is beginning to warm up. He has taken his hands out of his pockets, and is talking to Mason in earnest. Wonder what it's all about?"

"Dunno," grunted Browning; "but Merriwell can talk in a way to interest anybody. Never saw a fellow like him before. He is posted on everything and can talk about anything."

"See there!" palpitated Halliday. "Hanged if they aren't going away together! Yes, by Jove! they are going——"

"Arm in arm!" gasped Rattleton. "Bring me soothing syrup, chloroform, any old thing that is deadly! This—this is a heart blow!"

On all sides the snowballing lads paused and stared, amazed at the spectacle of the freshman bully and Frank walking across the campus arm in arm.

The change in Hock Mason was truly most amazing. The former bullying expression had disappeared from his face, and he seemed dejected and troubled.

It was universally supposed that Mason's dejection was caused by the thought that he had been humiliated by Merriwell, but still, instead of avoiding Frank, the former bully sought his society.

It was this fact that puzzled those who were watching the two, and Jack Diamond was by far the most astounded fellow in college.

Diamond had formed a powerful dislike for the big freshman. To him Mason still remained a coarse, brutal fellow, with no refinement or decency, and the Virginian abhorred him.

The more the Virginian thought this over the more puzzled he became, and he thought of it a great deal. At last, three days later, he went to Harry Rattleton and told him everything.

"What does Merry mean by having anything to do with that ruffianly freshman?" stormed Diamond. "Why, even Mason's former friends, or chums, among the freshmen have abandoned him since his downfall as their bullying leader."

"Perhaps that is why Merriwell is associating with him," said Harry.

"Perhaps that is the reason," repeated the Southerner, in a puzzled way. "I don't see why that should be a reason. Does it make Mason any better because his own class thinks he's too mean to travel with?"

"No, but it is pretty hard on Mason."

"Hard on him—yes. Just what he deserves! He brought it all on himself. What he deserves—no! He has not received what he deserves."

"I suppose Merry thinks he was the principal cause of Mason's downfall and so he associates with him as a balm to his fattered sheelings—I mean shattered feelings."

"Then Merriwell has a great weakness—he's a fool!" exploded Diamond. "I don't want to think him a fool."

"It does seem foolish for him to have anything to do with Mason."

"It is foolish! Rattles, we must do something to break that up."

"That will be easier to say than do, old man."

"Think so?"

"Know so. I have roomed with Merriwell, and I know him pretty well. If he thought——"

"Well, we'll try to show him the folly of his ways. Are you with me?"

"Sure."

On the evening after this conversation took place, Jack and Harry found Merriwell pouring over his Plato in his room.

"Hello, Merry!" called Rattleton, cheerfully, as he entered.

Diamond was not so exuberant in his salutation. He looked grim and troubled, dropping into a chair and staring hard at the tiger-skin rug on the floor.

"Make yourselves at home, fellows," said Frank. "You know this is Liberty Hall to all my friends, although many of them have not seemed to regard it thus of late."

"Know why?" asked Diamond, shortly.

Frank looked at him in surprise.

"Know why?" he repeated. "No, I don't suppose so. I haven't stopped to think much about it."

"Perhaps they didn't want to meet somebody they were liable to find here."

Frank put down his book, got up, stood with his feet apart and his hands resting on his hips, staring straight at the Virginian.

"Just what do you mean by that, old man?" he slowly asked.

"Just what I said," answered Jack, doggedly.

"And my friends have been staying away because they did not wish to meet somebody who comes here?"

"Yes."

Frank was not slow to understand; he saw it all in a moment, and he knew who Diamond was thinking of as he spoke.

"Are these the sort of friends I have!" exclaimed Merriwell, with a laugh that was touched with scorn. "Well, I suppose it is the way of the world."

"You can't blame them," said Diamond, grimly, while Harry Rattleton writhed in dismay, for the conversation had taken such an abrupt turn that the plans he and Jack

had formed for bringing it about were shattered, in a moment.

"I don't know but it is as much as I expected," said Frank, quietly.

"Isn't it as much as you have any right to expect?" demanded Diamond. "You can't suppose your best friends care to take chances of meeting in your room some fellow with whom they are not willing to associate or know."

Frank was silent, and, feeling that he had the best of it, Jack went on:

"You sometimes prefer to choose your own associates, I presume. That being the case, you would be inclined to keep away from some place where you were liable to meet some person you did not care to know. You can't deny that I am right."

"I shall not attempt to deny it."

"Well, you see why your friends are keeping away from your room. A certain person they do not care to meet comes here."

"I presume you mean Hock Mason?" said Frank, calmly.

"Yes, he is the fellow."

"I thought so."

"A low, brutal ruffian—a man of coarse instincts. Is it strange any decent fellow does not care to know him?"

Something like a grim smile flitted across Frank's face.

"You are putting that pretty steep," he said. "You say any decent fellow does not care to know him, and yet I know him."

"That is the mystery. Why you should be friendly with that bullying scoundrel is a mystery to everybody."

"He is no longer a bully, Diamond. Have you heard of any bullying act of his since he came from the hospital?"

"No, but I know he is still a bully at heart."

"What makes you think so?"

"Bullies do not become gentlemen in such short order. He can't change his nature."

"It is not absolutely necessary that a bully should become a gentleman the moment he ceases to be a bully. I acknowledge that the change from a bully to a gentleman cannot come about in a moment."

"Then do you mean to acknowledge that Hock Mason is not a gentleman, and still you associate with him and permit him to come to your room?"

"Hock Mason is as much of a gentleman as he can be at present, and I believe he will improve steadily."

"But he is not a gentleman, and you know it. Do you wonder that your friends will not come to your room and take chances of meeting some fellow who is not a gentleman—some fellow with whom you seem to be friendly? If they snubbed him, as he should be, then you would be offended, so, rather than offend you, they remain away."

Again Frank was silent. Diamond looked up and watched him closely, feeling that he had struck a body blow. He saw his words had some effect on Merriwell.

"Now," thought Jack—"now to follow it up."

Aloud he said:

"If you choose the society of one low fellow to that of the friends who have been true to you, you have no one but yourself to blame; but it seems to me that, when you see matters in their true light, you will come to your senses and everything will be all right again."

"What do my friends expect of me?"

"That you will give Hock Mason the frigid agitation, the marble heart, the grand bounce—that you will drop him for good and all. Then your old friends will come back to you, and things will be as they were before. What do you say, Merriwell—will you drop Mason?"

And Frank quietly but firmly answered:

"No."

CHAPTER VII.

RATTLETON'S EYES ARE OPENED.

"No?" cried Diamond.

"No?" echoed Rattleton.

"No," repeated Merriwell.

Jack and Harry were astonished, for they had fancied that the case had been presented so strongly that Frank could not fail to appreciate the situation, and it had not seemed possible he would prefer a chap like Hock Mason to his former friends when he fully understood his position.

"You refuse to give Mason the shake?" flared Diamond, angrily, his face growing crimson.

"Yes."

Jack sprang to his feet.

"I was right!" he cried. "Rattleton has boasted that you have no weak points, but I told him you did have, for you were fool enough to stick by Hock Mason. I was right. Merriwell, you are a fool!"

These words he flung straight into Frank's face, the passionate Southerner being aroused to a point where he cast discretion aside.

Frank drew back a bit, putting both hands behind him while his face grew pale.

"Look here, Diamond," he slowly said, "you accuse me of choosing the society of a person who is not a gentleman, but it strikes me that you are showing yourself anything but a gentleman just now."

The words were cutting, and they brought the Virginian to a sense of his angry speech.

"I am trying to make you understand," he said, huskily.

"I saw it was no use to talk to you in an ordinary manner, and I didn't know but I could wake you up by being insulting."

"But for the fact that we are friends who have fought for each other in the past, your words would have aroused me—to your regret. I don't think any other person ever called me a fool to my face without afterward swallowing his words.

"I do not want to fight——"

"You will not have to. We had our little trouble, and it was settled, but it will be rather hard for me to forget your insulting words of a moment ago. Friends who insult me are not friends I desire."

"Oh, all right!" flared Jack, once more. "I think I understand you now! You do not desire my friendship. Very well; you'll not be troubled with it in the future. Good-evening!"

Then, before Merriwell could say another word, he caught up his cap and rushed from the room, slamming the door behind him.

Rattleton was all broken up.

"Too bad!" he exclaimed.

"Oh, I don't know," said Frank, calmly. "He talked plainly to me, and I retaliated in the same manner."

"But he has such a temper, and it takes him so long to get over anything."

"He will come to his senses sooner or later."

"But," said Harry, hesitatingly, "really you are wrong, Frank."

"Eh? How?"

"It can't be that you prefer a fellow like Hock Mason to your old friends?"

"No."

"But you choose him instead of them."

"No."

"You do—you did."

"You are mistaken, Rattles, old man. I simply refused to throw Mason over."

"Well, what is that but a choice?"

"Much. Look here, Harry, I believe in building up, not in tearing down. If I see a poor fellow in the mud and I can pull him out by giving him a hand, I do not hold back for fear I may get a little mud off him onto me. The fellow who does hold back for such a reason is a moral coward, no matter how brave he may be physically."

Harry was silent, and Merriwell went on, warming up to his subject.

"Mason is down, and it would not take much to put him still lower. He feels that everybody is against him, and his courage is not great. I was the principal cause of his downfall, and I fail to see why I should push him farther."

"You needn't push him farther, but you can lone him a let—I mean let him alone."

"Would that be right?"

"Why not?"

"Would it be the act of a Christian?"

Harry gasped for breath.

"A—a what?" he cried.

"A Christian."

"Do you profess to be a Christian?"

"I make no profession, but I see no reason why, when the opportunity offers, I should not do an act of Christianity."

Never was Rattleton more amazed. He got on his feet unsteadily, stared at Frank, shook his head, and then sat down weakly.

"It beats me!" he muttered.

"I see no reason why you should be so astonished, Rat-

bles," said Frank, quietly. "There are two kinds of Christianity—professed Christianity and practical Christianity. I believe in the practical kind, and, as far as possible, I have tried to live by it all my life. I have always been square and upright; I have never tried to injure any person wantonly; I have been inclined to forgive my enemies, and I have never lost an opportunity to hold out a helping hand to a fellow-creature in distress. I don't go about boasting of these things, and you know it, Rattles. I don't think I ever spoke to any one but you of them, but if you will stop to think, you will remember that I have practiced them. That is what I call practical Christianity."

Rattleton was silent, still staring at Frank, as if, for the first time, he was beginning to understand this side of his friend's nature.

Harry thought of the many times Frank had forgiven enemies who had tried to injure him. Now he understood why it had been done. Merry was trying to be a practical Christian without making a big show of himself as a professed Christian.

Rattleton's heart began to warm toward Frank in a new way. All along he had loved this dashing young athlete, who was a leader in all manly sports, but now he saw a depth in Frank's nature that had never before opened to him. For a moment Merry had drawn away the curtain from a chamber of his soul and permitted his companion to peep awesomely into that sacred room.

Frank was serious—Harry thought him far more serious than he had ever been before. The expression on his face was new to Rattleton.

"I think you are beginning to understand what I mean, old man," said Merriwell, as he approached and placed a hand on Harry's shoulder. "Hock Mason was down—I helped throw him down. He was in disgrace, and his courage was broken. He did not think he could come

back to college, and he would have abandoned the attempt but for me."

"You induced him to come back?"

"Yes."

"Don't—don't tell the fellows that!"

"Why?"

"They'll say you were a fool. Everybody hoped he would not come back. His return was the only thing they feared."

"Because they thought he would return to his old bullying ways?"

"Sure."

"Has he showed any signs of doing so?"

"Not yet, but——"

"But what?"

"He is not fully recovered yet. All the fellows think he is keeping still till he gets in good trim, and then he will light on some of the fellows he knows he can bully."

"And I think they are wrong."

"You believe—just what?"

"I believe Hock Mason is cured."

Harry shook his head.

"You doubt that?" said Frank. "Well, I don't know as it is strange, but I think I am a fairly good reader of human nature, and I am sure I brought about the change in Mason."

"How—by knocking him out with your fists and then painting him when you caught him in your room?"

"No."

"How, then?"

"By taking an interest in him when he was in the hospital. I was the only person who went there to inquire about him, and I was the first and only visitor from college to see him while he was in the hospital. He was

astounded by it, and his heart melted the first time I came to the side of his cot."

"I don't know about melting the heart of such a ruffian as that fellow is."

"Not 'is,' Harry, but 'was,' for he is no longer a ruffian. If you had been with me, you would have been convinced. All through his illness Mason had thought how there was no one who cared enough for him to even ask if he were living or dead. He had come to realize that his failure to return to college would be a source of pleasure to almost everybody. He even realized that many of them would express satisfaction and pleasure if they were to hear that he had died. Such thoughts made him bitterer than ever at first, but he was finally led to think why it was so. Then he saw that he alone was to blame for the state of things, and no one in college ever despised him more than he despised himself."

Harry's interest was increasing with each moment. Still it did not seem possible that Mason, the brutal bully, had ever paused to think such thoughts or to care what anybody thought of him, even though he did think them. It had once seemed to be his delight to keep others in fear of him. He did not seem to want them to have any feeling of affection for him; if they cringed with fear and fawned about him like whipped curs he was happy.

Could such a nature be changed in a moment?

Harry still doubted.

"When I was admitted to the hospital the first time to see Mason," Merriwell went on, "he turned his head away that I might not see the tears in his eyes."

"Scrate Gott!" gurgled Rattleton. "Ears in his ties—I mean tears in his eyes! Come off!"

"It is true!"

"Oh, you don't want me to believe that! You are jollying now, Merry."

"Not a bit of it. There were tears in Hock Mason's eyes. You are not to mention this to the fellows, Harry."

"Oh, I won't—you needn't be afraid of that!" cried Rattleton. "I don't want them to call me a thundering liar! I won't say a word about it."

"Mason was astounded to think I should call to ask about him. He was amazed to think I should care."

"Well he might be!"

"When he found I really did care, then he told me of all he had thought about himself as he lay there ill and alone on that cot. He told me how mean he felt and how he had hated himself. I saw my opportunity to do an act of practical Christianity, and I did not let it pass. Then and there I pledged myself to be Hock Mason's friend, and stand by him if he would give up his old ways and turn over a new leaf."

"Great smoke! what a nerve!"

"It takes nerve sometimes to be a practical Christian."

"I suppose Mason jumped at the opportunity—suppose he was eager to be known as the friend of Frank Merriwell, the most popular fellow in Yale?"

"Nothing of the sort."

"What's that? He didn't?"

"No."

"What did he do?"

"Refused."

"Now, Merry, you are putting it on pretty thick again. Why did he refuse?"

"Because he said it would injure me to be known as his friend. He said he would not pull me down by associating with me."

Rattleton nearly lost his breath.

"Hock Mason—Hock Mason said such a thing as that?" he palpitated.

"He did."

"Merry—have—you—any—salting—smells? I mean any—smelling salts?"

"No," smiled Frank, "but I can throw some cold water on you if you are going to faint."

"Never mind it," said Harry, weakly. "I think I'll pull out without flying off the handle. But it nearly did me up. It was an awful shock, Merry—awful!"

Frank was forced to laugh at this, but still he protested that he was in earnest in all he had said.

"It was some time," continued Frank, "before Mason would agree to let me be known publicly as his friend."

"Frank!"

"What is it?"

"I think I know why he did not want you to appear friendly toward him."

"I know, too."

"You are wrong. It was shame."

"Shame—no, it——"

"I tell you it was shame. He knew the fellows would laugh—they would say he had been conquered. He did not want that, and that is why he did not want to appear publicly as friendly toward you. I have hit it, Frank."

"You have hit it wrong, Rattles. I am certain I read him aright, and I attribute a nobler motive to Hock Mason. He knew he was unpopular, and he believed it would injure me to associate with him. For that reason he did not want it publicly known there was any friendship between us."

"If you are right," said Harry, slowly, "I shall begin to believe there is something in Hock Mason."

"I am right—I know I am right. And I am going to do everything in my power to make a better fellow of Mason. I believe it is my duty."

"Even though all your former friends desert you?"

"Even though the last one of them deserts me!" ex-

claimed Merriwell, firmly, and his handsome face shone with a light that added to the admiration which Rattleton felt for him.

"Well, Frank," said Harry, rising, "all I have to say is that you have lots of nerve."

"Am I right, or wrong?"

"Well, I guess you are right—you are always right."

"I am glad to hear you say that, old man. Give me your hand!"

Their hands clasped.

"Now," said Frank, "what I have told you about Mason's tears and all that is to be a secret, you know—you are not to speak of it."

"No danger."

"All right. For all of former friends, I am going ahead just as I have started. I shall stand by Hock Mason and try my best to make a decent fellow of him."

"You are right about one thing," said Harry. "What you are doing is an act of practical Christianity."

CHAPTER VIII.

DIAMOND'S PLAN.

Jack Diamond was waiting for Rattleton to appear. He collared Harry.

"Come!" he exclaimed.

"Where?" asked Harry.

"To my room."

"All right."

To Jack's room they went.

Diamond closed and locked the door behind them. Then he exploded.

"I'm going to kill Hock Mason!"

"Hey?" gasped Rattleton, in great alarm, for he feared Diamond's fiery Southern blood was aroused to such a pitch that he meant to actually kill the former bully.

"It must be done!" declared the Virginian, pacing excitedly up and down the floor.

"You are not in earnest, Jack—you can't be?"

"Why not?"

"Such a thing is ridiculous."

"Why ridiculous?"

"You are excited, or you would not ask such a silly question. Why should you kill Hock Mason?"

"To keep him from killing Frank Merriwell!"

Rattleton staggered, gasping:

"What do you mean? You do not think Mason is plotting to do Merry up in some cowardly manner?"

"I don't know what Mason is plotting to do, but I do know what he is doing—he is killing Merriwell socially. For all of Merriwell's popularity a short time ago, the fellows are beginning to turn from him with scorn be-

cause he has anything to do with such a lowborn creature as Hock Mason. I told Merriwell to-night that he was a fool, but when I did that I made a fool of myself. I should have held my temper and tried to reason further with him."

"You would have wasted your breath."

"Perhaps not."

"I know it."

"How?"

"I know the whole business from start to finish. Merry told me everything after you left."

"What did he tell you?"

Harry hesitated. He wondered how much he could tell.

Jack instantly observed that hesitation, and he resolved to know everything. Immediately he became cool, and he set his wits to work worming the story out of Rattleton. Within half an hour he had learned everything save the one thing Frank had pledged Harry not to tell—that Mason had shed tears when Merriwell visited him in the hospital.

Then Diamond set about convincing Rattleton that Merriwell was making the mistake of his life.

"Mason knows he has met his match in Merriwell," said the Virginian, "and he thinks he sees his opportunity to bolster himself up through this seeming friendship. Take my word for it, he is doing this thing out of purely selfish motives."

Harry began to think Diamond was right.

"He thinks that as long as he cannot remain the bully that he has been he will keep his head up by the aid of Merriwell. It makes no difference to him that he is dragging Merriwell down. What if he does drag Merriwell down? He will rejoice in that, for Merriwell was the man who caused his downfall. It's ten to one he has

thought this out in just this way. It's more than even chances that he is trying to drag Merriwell down."

Harry began to get excited now, but still he hated to think that Frank was being deceived—that Frank had made a mistake.

"I told him all this," he declared, "but he convinced me I was wrong."

"He couldn't convince me."

"What can we do?"

"We'll do something to break it up, bet your life!"

"My head is all uddled and maddled—I mean muddled and addled," confessed Rattleton. "I don't seem able to think of anything."

"I am doing a little thinking, old man. I'll tell you how we can find out if Merriwell is right in thinking Mason did not wish to have it known they were friendly for fear he might damage Merry in that way."

"How?"

"We'll go to Mason and tell him he is making Merriwell unpopular."

"What good will that do?"

"We'll ask him to keep away from Merriwell. We will tell him it is his only way of showing his manhood and saving Merriwell from disgrace. We will try to get him to promise not to have anything at all to do with Merriwell."

"If he refuses—what?"

"We'll know he is sticking to Merry from purely selfish motives. It will settle that point."

"But if he agrees to cut Merriwell?"

"It will be a good job, in case he agrees and keeps his agreement."

"But it will ruin Frank's plan to pull Mason up."

"What of that? It's our duty to ruin it if we can save Frank. Why should Merriwell sacrifice himself for a creature like Hock Mason? Merriwell's small toe is bet-

ter than the whole of Mason! One drop of his blood is worth all there is in Mason's carcass! You know that."

Diamond's fiery words aroused a feeling of fire in Harry's breast.

"That's right—that's right!" Rattleton cried.

"Then why should he offer himself as a sacrifice in an attempt to better the condition of a creature like Mason—an attempt that is almost certain to prove a failure?"

"He should not."

"Of course he shouldn't. Now you are getting sensible, Harry. And we are the boys to see that he does not make a fool of himself. If we can get Mason to keep away from Frank, it will be a good job—a job to be proud of. If there is anything in Mason, he'll feel that he is doing a good act, and it will make him all the better. Really, we will be helping Mason instead of hurting him, Rattles."

Harry did not pause to consider if Diamond's reasoning was perfectly sound. It seemed all right, and that was enough. He was carried away by the smooth reasoning of the fiery Southerner.

"Never looked at it that way before, Jack," he said, "but your head's level. You've got a great nut on you, old man."

Jack didn't give him an opportunity to think it all over soberly. He saw he had carried the day with Rattleton, and so he hastened to put the plan into action before Harry could think the whole matter over again.

"Now is our time," he said. "We should get at Mason without delay, before he can injure Merriwell any further."

"That's so," agreed Harry, who was now in condition to agree to anything Diamond might say.

"Let's go for him to-night?" proposed Jack.

"Do you dare?"

"Dare!" flashed Diamond. "Do you think I'm afraid of that big lubber?"

"He's an awful fighter when he starts out, and he has beaten some of the fellows frightfully."

"What of that?"

"He may think we are meddling with something that is none of our business. It may infuriate him, and then——"

"You think he may try to jump us?"

"Yes."

"You think it may be that he has kept from beating somebody just as long as he can?"

"That's it."

"Well, I don't know but you are right."

"Then are you going to tell him he is injuring Merriwell, and take chances of being knocked down and hammered senseless?"

"You are afraid of Mason, Rattles—you don't want to face him."

Harry flushed, but admitted that Diamond was right.

"You need not go," said Jack, quietly.

"But you—will you go?"

"Yes."

"Alone?"

"Yes."

"Well, you have a nerve! You shall not go alone. I will go with you."

"You may be sure of one thing," said Diamond, as he opened a drawer in his dressing case. "Mason never will be given a chance to knock me down and kick me."

"What will you do if he tries it?"

"I'll stop him."

"How?"

"With this."

Diamond took a loaded revolver out of the drawer and slipped it into his pocket.

CHAPTER IX.

ON THE WAY TO SEE MASON.

Instantly Harry wilted. He knew Diamond's fiery temper, and he fully understood the danger.

"That settles it!" he exclaimed. "I am not going with you to see Mock Hason—I mean Hock Mason."

"Not? Why not?"

"You are altogether too fiery, old man, and you are too wrought up over this business. I don't know what you might try to do with that gun."

"If Mason attempted to hammer me, I'd stand him off. If he pushed me too hard, I'd shoot him. It would be a case of self-defense. We could both swear we were afraid of our lives."

"Would you swear that was why you took the revolver with you?"

"Yes."

"Jack, I won't go."

"Why not?"

"I can't trust you."

"Had you rather take chances of being hammered half to death by that big brute of a freshman?"

"Yes."

"Will you go if I leave this gun here?"

"Yes."

Diamond took the revolver out of his pocket and tossed it back into the drawer, which he closed and locked.

"I will leave it," he said, quietly. "I want you to come along, for I want you to hear all that is said. It is possible Mason will be so angry that he will make some damaging

admissions. If that happens, I want somebody to substantiate me when I tell them to Merriwell."

"What sort of admissions are you expecting him to make?"

"Why, when we accuse him of attempting to injure Frank, he may get hot and say he is trying that, and defy us to stop it. See? If we hear anything like that, and we can carry it to Merriwell, it may be a body blow for Mason. Twig my little game?"

"I do; but if the fellow is crafty enough to work Merriwell, he may be too slick to give away the game like that."

"Too slick when he isn't angered, but you know he is a man who permits his passions to get the best of him."

Harry knew it, and he knew that Diamond was another, but he was sure it would not be a healthy thing for any one to say as much to Jack.

"If he will not agree to break away from Merriwell and keep away," said the lad from Virginia, "I'll call him a few names that will stir him up. Then I'll tell him what I think—that is, that he is doing his best to drag Merry into the mire. It's ten to one he will flare up and say I am right, and challenge us to prevent it."

Harry looked dubious.

"By Jove, Jack!" he exclaimed. "We have a mighty dirty job on our hands. Mason is a bad man to call hard names."

"You can back out now if you want to. I will take my gun and go alone."

"And shoot the fellow?—that's what you'd do!"

"If he crowded me."

"You shall not go!"

Diamond laughed scornfully.

"Why, Rattles," he cried, "you can't stop me!"

Harry realized this was true. For a moment he was in despair, and then came the final resolution to go with Dia-

mond. He could see no way out of it. It would not do to let Jack call on Mason alone with that revolver in his pocket. Were he to do so, and were he to shoot Mason in self-defense, which Rattleton understood was quite likely to happen, there would be no witness to prove he had not gone there with the deliberate intention of killing the giant freshman.

"Jack," said Harry, "you must let me search you before we start."

"Search me? What for?"

"To make sure you have no other weapons."

A grim smile came to Jack's face.

"Go ahead," he said.

Rattleton searched through the pockets of the Virginian, removing a common clasp knife.

"Why are you taking that away from me?" asked Jack, surprised.

"I have heard of cases where, in a fight, some fellow got out a knife like that, opened it, and cut the other fellow all up with it. I am not going to have you do anything of that sort."

"All right. I'll leave that here, too."

When they were ready to leave the room, Harry suggested that Jack put on his overcoat, but Diamond declined.

"No," he said, "I don't want to be bothered with that if I have to scrap with Mason. I'll leave it here. If the freshman hits me, you must sail into him, Rattleton. We'll do our best to punch his face off. How is that?"

"I am with you, old man, so long as nothing but fists are used."

"Then come on."

They left the room, locking the door behind them.

Mason had a room in a freshman boarding house on York Street. In that house Rattleton and Merriwell had

roomed when they first came to New Haven, and so Harry knew just where to find the fellow they sought. He also knew how to gain admittance to the house.

Up to Mason's room they went, Jack leading. Rattleton's heart was thumping violently, but still he was ready and determined to stand by Diamond, no matter what happened.

Rat-tat-tat!

Diamond knocked on the door in a bold, aggressive manner.

There was a moment's pause, and a voice called:

"Come in."

They opened the door and entered, closing the door behind them.

Mason was there alone. He looked up in astonishment from a book he had been reading. Then he put the book down.

That book, as Rattleton saw, was the Bible!

When Harry made this discovery he staggered as if he had been struck. Hock Mason, the freshman bully, reading the Bible! Such a thing seemed beyond the bounds of possibility, and it is not strange Rattleton was nearly paralyzed with amazement. He looked again, to make sure he was not mistaken.

No, the book was the Bible.

Diamond did not pay any attention to the book. He had eyes for nothing but Mason, whom he was watching like a hawk.

"Er—excuse me!" exclaimed Mason, rising in confusion. "I thought it was the landlady. She said she would bring up the receipt for the rent this evening."

"Where is your roommate?" asked Diamond, coldly.

"My roommate!" echoed the freshman. "Why, I have none."

"That's odd," said Jack, suspiciously. "Why not?"

Mason's face, which had not regained its natural color since he was ill, now flushed painfully.

"Because," he said, slowly, "because no one cares to room with me."

"Oh, that is it!" exclaimed Jack, and his expression seemed to add, "I don't wonder."

"Yes, that is it," said Mason, with humility.

"He's putting on that humble air," thought Jack. "The duffer thinks he can fool us! He can't."

"Won't you sit down, gentlemen?" invited Mason, offering chairs.

"No," refused Jack, "what we have to say to you we can say standing."

Mason bowed. The expression of his face showed he was wondering why they had visited him there.

Now that the time had come, Diamond found it rather awkward to go at the freshman as he had intended. He cleared his throat, all the while watching Mason narrowly, and said:

"We have come to see you about an important matter, eh, Harry?"

"Yes, yes," said Rattleton, quickly, "whatever Jack goes has to say—I mean, what he says has to go."

It was plain that Mason's curiosity was aroused, and his wonderment showed itself on his face. What matter of importance could have brought them to see him? However, with a dignity that surprised Jack, he restrained his curiosity and waited for Diamond to express himself.

"It's—it's about Merriwell," said Jack, hesitating despite himself.

"What about him?" asked the freshman.

"You—you are rather friendly with him since—since he did you up the last time you put up a job on him," said Jack, with a bluntness that was foreign to his usual courtesy and politeness.

Mason drew himself up a bit, and Diamond, for the first time, was struck by the magnificence of the fellow's perfect figure.

"Mr. Merriwell," said the freshman, slowly, "has seen fit to show a friendly feeling toward me, for all of the past. It was very good of him, and I appreciate it more than I can say in words."

"I hope you do," said Jack, quickly. "We are here to put you to the test."

Slowly a look of suspicion gathered on Mason's face. It was plain he regarded them as enemies, and fancied they were going to try to get him into a trap.

"What sort of a test?" he finally asked.

Rattleton felt that the tug of war had come, and he feared Diamond would go at the freshman in a manner that would arouse Mason's anger and antagonism.

Still, Harry was relieved to think the task was not required of him. He knew well enough that he would be unequal to it.

Jack hesitated, and then he braced up and spoke swiftly:

"You must know, Mr. Mason, that you are anything but a popular man in college."

Mason winced a bit, as if a sore spot had been touched, but Diamond rattled on:

"In fact, you are, if anything, the most unpopular man in Yale. You have nobody but yourself to blame that this is so."

Mason made a gesture of protest, opened his lips, as if about to speak, closed them firmly, and was silent.

Of a sudden, a feeling that some consideration was due this fellow's feelings, if he had feelings, struck Diamond, and his next words were somewhat apologetic:

"You will understand that, in order to make our business plain, it is necessary I should talk plainly."

"Go on," said the freshman, hoarsely.

"Mr. Merriwell," continued Diamond, "is the most popular man in college. He made himself so through his own efforts. You must know it is certain to damage any man who associates with you at present. Later, if it is seen that you have changed for the better, this order of things may change, but, just now, no self-respecting fellow can afford to be classed as your friend."

Rattleton gasped for breath. He prepared for the outburst that he felt must come. He was sure that Mason, the bully with the ungovernable temper, would assault Diamond.

For a few seconds it seemed that Rattleton was right in thinking this, for Mason's face grew dark as a stormy cloud, his hands were clinched, his eyes gleamed, and his strong white teeth shone through his parted lips. He glared at Jack as if longing to annihilate the Virginian.

Diamond saw all this, and he put himself in a position to meet the assault.

It did not come. Instead, something happened that astonished both the youths.

The look of fury fled from Mason's face, and its place was taken by an expression of pain and shame that was pitiful to see. He covered his face with his hands, uttered a bitter groan, and sank down on a chair, where he sat still, with his face covered.

Jack and Harry looked at each other in astonishment.

"Jee whiz!" gasped Rattleton.

"The deuce!" muttered Diamond.

Then they were silent, staring at the freshman, who seemed like a creature utterly humiliated and crushed. They saw Mason's body quiver with suppressed emotion, but after that deep groan, which seemed to come from his very heart, not another sound escaped his lips.

Then Rattleton began to feel ashamed.

"It's too bad, Diamond!" he whispered in Jack's ear. "You hit the fellow too hard."

"Thought that was the only way to have any effect on the fellow," whispered back Diamond, who now seemed in doubt.

"Mistake Go light."

After some seconds, Diamond started to speak again.

"I beg your pardon," he said, "but I wished to make it plain just how the matter stood, and——"

"You have!" exclaimed Mason, hoarsely, dropping his hands from his face and rising to his feet. "You have made it very plain. You are right—I confess it. No self-respecting fellow can afford to be friendly with me."

Diamond seemed relieved, but hastened to say:

"There may come a time——"

Mason stopped him with a gesture and a bitter smile.

"That is not necessary," he said. "You need not apply any salve to the sore. You have said what you meant, and I understood it. What comes next?"

Now Jack found his task harder than ever. It was only by nerving himself to the highest pitch and thinking that he was doing it for Merriwell that he brought himself to continue.

"Since you came out of the hospital you have been seen with Frank Merriwell. This has occurred so often that all the college has commented on it. You visit him in his room. His former friends are beginning to quit him. They do not visit his room because they know not when they will meet you there. They shun him outside of his room because they know not when you will join him."

The bitter smile on Mason's face changed to one of deepest scorn.

"Fine friends!" he sneered; "but true to human nature. Go on."

Diamond felt the sting of Mason's words, and lamely

attempted to defend Merriwell's friends who were holding aloof from him.

"No matter what Mr. Merriwell can do, many of them feel that they cannot afford to become familiar with a man as unpopular as you are, Mr. Mason. They know it will injure them. Even though they remain loyal to Frank Merriwell in their hearts, he is deprived of their society by you. Have you any right to force yourself upon him, and thus rob him of the society of his friends and admirers?"

For a second time Mason drew himself up to his full height, and a proud look came to his rugged face.

"Mr. Diamond," he said, his powerful voice intense with the depth of his feelings, "I have never forced myself upon Frank Merriwell. If any person says so, that person lies! Mr. Merriwell chose to be friendly with me. I told him it would injure him, but he refused to consider that fact at all. He has urged me to come to his room often. When I have remained away a little while, he has met me outside and taken me there. If you do not believe this, ask him. He will tell you I have not forced myself upon him."

"This may be true," said Jack, after some hesitation; "but have you any claim upon him?"

"None at all."

"Then have you any right to accept his friendship, knowing you are doing him an injury in such a manner?"

"I respect Mr. Merriwell more than I can say. I do not wish to do him an injury."

"Then, that being the case, why do not you shun him, why not refuse to accept his friendship? If you really care anything for Frank Merriwell, as you claim, you will do this. If you do this, I shall believe you sincere, and I shall believe that the time will come when even Merriwell will be able to acknowledge you as a friend."

"This is what you wish me to do, is it?"

"Yes."

"You wish me to make Frank Merriwell believe I do not choose to accept his friendship?"

"That's it."

"He will think me a miserable, ungrateful cur! It's a hard thing you are asking of me, John Diamond!"

"But it is for Merriwell's sake. You can afford to do it, knowing you are doing it for his sake."

"Yes!" cried Mason, his voice breaking with a sound that was half a sob. "Yes, I will do it—for his sake!"

CHAPTER X.

A SURPRISE FOR RATTLETON.

Diamond and Rattleton left the freshman's room and made their way out of the house onto the street. They stopped and looked at each other under the first lamp they reached.

"Am I dreaming?" muttered Rattleton. "Isn't it all a mistake? Surely it was not Hock Mason, the bully, we saw!"

Diamond pinched himself.

"It's no dream," he declared; "but I swear, I am not willing to believe it yet! There is something beneath the surface—something we did not tumble to."

"What do you mean by that?"

"Hanged if I know just what I do mean, but I won't believe Hock Mason ever gave such a promise without being forced into it! He won't keep that promise!"

"You are wrong, Jack," said Harry, positively. "I'll stake my life that he will!"

"It's impossible, man! He's up to some trick."

"No! You hit him hard with your plain words—you must have seen that."

"Well, if he wasn't hard hit, he is a better actor than I ever dreamed he could be."

"It was not acting, Jack."

"Hanged if he didn't make me feel ashamed of myself for a minute!" confessed Diamond. "Why, I didn't think he would be ruffled. I thought I would have to pound him in order to get anything through his thick head."

"He hasn't a thick head, Jack, for all that he was a bully."

"That's plain enough now. And he didn't light on me! We got his promise, and we didn't get into a fight! I swear, it still seems like a dream."

They walked away, talking it over. They resolved to watch Mason and see if he kept his word.

The very next day, from the window of his room, Diamond saw Frank Merriwell hurry and overtake Mason on the campus, saw Mason turn his back to Merriwell and walk away, saw Merry thrust his hands deep into his pockets and whistle his astonishment.

"Thunder!" gasped Diamond. "I really believe that fellow is going to try to keep his word! Well, it will be a good thing for Merry, but it must be that Mason was looking for a good excuse to snub Merry publicly. He feels that he is getting back into his old form, and he wants to go up against Frank again."

Jack could not bring himself to think Hock Mason was keeping his promise because of a desire to help Frank. Instead, he still clung to the belief that every act of Mason's was prompted by a selfish motive.

But, as soon as possible, he told Rattleton what he had seen.

"I knew it!" cried Harry, triumphantly. "I knew Mason would keep his promise!"

"Wait!" said Jack, stubbornly. "I am not satisfied yet."

"But—but you saw him."

"Yes. He may have seen me at the window—he may have known I was watching."

"Oh, say, old fellow, don't be so hard on him! If he saw you, and he meant to hang to Merry, he would have taken satisfaction in talking with Frank before your eyes and walking off with him."

"Then he has intended all along to snub Merriwell as soon as he was strong enough to dare, and he was glad of the opportunity."

"You are uncharitable, Jack. I believe Hock Mason is more of a man than we have ever dreamed, and I believe he is doing as he promised to do because he thinks it is for Merry's good."

"Well, time will tell."

While they were watching Mason, they watched Merriwell also, and it was not long before they discovered that, regularly every evening Frank was going out all alone, returning to his room quite as regularly shortly after ten o'clock. Where he went was a mystery. He did not visit Morey's, Traeger's, or any of the students' resorts in town, and yet he was in town somewhere.

Rattleton decided to follow Frank and find out the truth. At first this looked like spying on his friend, and he hesitated. Then he remembered that a change had come over Frank of late—remembered that Merriwell was strangely grave and thoughtful with a look on his face as if he were haunted by something that he kept a secret in the depths of his heart.

"He's been in all sorts of scrapes," thought Harry. "Perhaps he is in another. He has had all sorts of enemies, and it is possible a new enemy has a hold on him. If I can help him in any manner, I want to do so. If I find he is going somewhere that I have no right to go, I will turn about."

And so, out of the goodness of his heart, and from not idle curiosity, Rattleton followed Frank.

Merry did not know any one was following him. He walked with a swift step, leaving the vicinity of the college and making direct for the poorer section of the city.

"Well, this means something," muttered the trailer. "He isn't coming here for nothing."

In the very lowest section of the city they approached a little mission chapel. Merriwell did not hesitate, but boldly entered the place, as if he had been there before.

"Wheejiz!" gurgled Rattleton, as he paused and thumped his hands together to warm them, for the air was biting cold that evening. "This staggers me! What is the meaning of it?"

Harry felt that he had stumbled upon a mystery. For some time he remained silent, watching and waiting for Merriwell to come out, but Frank did not appear. He saw several poorly dressed men and women go into the building.

Becoming restless, Harry walked past. This he repeated several times. He thought he would go in, but hesitated about doing so.

Then, as he was passing, he heard sounds of singing coming from the chapel. He halted, astonished beyond measure, for amid the cracked, wheezy, wretched voices he heard one that was young, and strong, and clear.

It was Frank Merriwell's voice! Frank was in there, and he was leading the singing!

"Am I dreaming?" gasped the lad, who was listening outside. "It isn't possible!"

Then he resolved to settle the question without further delay. Up the mission steps he went, opened the door softly, and slipped in.

The place was pretty well crowded, and the most of those present were wretched outcasts and still more wretched women. The younger men and boys in the place plainly were hoodlums and toughs, some of them having faces that seemed to indicate that they were vile enough for almost any dishonest deed.

Harry slipped in without being seen and took a seat near the door at the back of the house. On the platform Frank Merriwell was standing, leading the singing:

"Jesus, lover of my soul,
Let me to thy bosom fly."

The voices of the wretched men quavered through the lines, but they did their best. They were safe from the cold for a short time, at least. The mission provided hot coffee for all, and that was one of the principal things that brought them there.

But, after a time, Harry was to discover there was another reason why they came there. They were there, many of them, to hear Frank Merriwell talk to them. And he did talk to them after the singing was over. He did not preach, he did not exhort, but he went right down among them, walking from one to another, and he talked to them as if he was one of them, no better.

It was not a lecture of temperance—it was something better. In a way that was indescribable, he showed them that he sympathized with them all, that his heart was full of love for them. He spoke as if he, too, were in the gutter, as if he were fighting the demon drink, but was conquered again and again in his battle.

“But we’ll never give up fighting, will we, friends?” he said, his voice full of earnestness. “We’ll make one more struggle to get up again in the world. We can do it, if we try, and we’ll try with all the strength we possess. We know that drink drowns the bitter memories of the past, makes us forget our broken homes and the lost ones who are dear to us. But it’s only for a short time, and then, when we can get no more drink, the hateful memories crowd thicker and heavier upon us. We remember the loved ones of years ago, we see their sad eyes looking mournfully upon us, we see baby hands outstretched to us, and then—then we are ready to sell our very souls for another drink to drown those memories.

“But there is a chance for the worst of us. We can throw off the iron fetters if we make one more desperate struggle. There is always hope as long as there is life. We can become men again, and we can go back to some of

the dear ones who had waited for us so long—who are waiting for us to-night. If there are no dear ones waiting, we can make a new place for ourselves in the world, we can become good men and women, and in time there will be dear ones who love and respect us as we deserve.”

As he went on he became more and more eloquent. It was wonderful to see how the old vagrants hung onto every word he uttered. It was wonderful to see how he swayed them by the music of his voice and the eloquence of his words.

Then, when he finished, he showed them the pledge, which was ready for them to sign. He held it out to them as their anchor of hope.

A miserable, blear-eyed, tottering wreck arose to his feet, tears streaming down his bloated face.

“I will sign it!” he cried, brokenly. “I’ll make one more attempt. Somewhere I have a wife and a son. He must be a young man now. Ain’t seen him for years—never expected to see him again. But I’ll sign the pledge, and I’ll try to reform. Perhaps—sometime—I may be man enough to go back to my wife and my boy. I’ve tried before, but I’ll try again.”

He went up to the table to sign the pledge. Frank took him by the hand, shook it joyfully, spoke earnest, encouraging words to him, and he cried like a child.

And then Harry Rattleton, choking with his own emotion, dazed by the wonder of what he had seen and heard, got up and slipped out of the building.

“Merciful goodness!” he gasped, when he reached the street. “What will Merry do next? This is another example of practical Christianity.”

CHAPTER XI.

DIAMOND LOSES HIS TEMPER.

On the way back to his room, Rattleton passed Morey's. Some roystering lads were coming out, and another party was entering. Harry was recognized, and they called to him to join them, but he refused and continued on his way.

Straight to his room Rattleton went. Alone he sat down and meditated on his discovery. He thought of Frank Merriwell—first as the jolly freshman he had known, the leader of his class in its war against the sophomores; then he thought of Frank as an athlete, a pitcher on the baseball team, and one of the most enthusiastic football players at Yale; he remembered Frank at the poker table, when Merry for a short time had yielded to his one great weakness, the passion for gambling; then came memories of the famous trip across the continent, and the many thrilling adventures encountered, through all of which Frank had been the leader; finally to his fancy came a picture of the last football game between Yale and Harvard, when Frank was carried from the field on the shoulders of his madly cheering admirers, the hero of the hour, having won the game by one of the most remarkable plays ever seen on the gridiron.

But of all the strange scenes with which Frank Merriwell was associated, Harry Rattleton felt that he had witnessed the most remarkable in the little mission that evening.

He gasped for breath as he thought of Frank Merriwell, a fine Greek scholar, a magnificent athlete, a fellow with the most delicate instincts and the most scrupulous habits of cleanliness, the most popular man at Yale, surrounded by greasy, bleary-eyed, besotted wretches of the gutter, and

talking to them exactly as if he was one of them, and not a bit better.

"If I were to know that fellow a thousand years, I'd never fully understand him!" exclaimed Harry. "There are unsounded depths to his nature, and I believe Frank Merriwell is a practical Christian. He does not make much of a show of being a Christian, but his every act since I have known him has been an act of manliness and justice. If he doesn't become one of the greatest and grandest men the world has ever seen, it will be a wonder."

Then, when Harry thought that there was a part of Frank's life of which his best friends knew very little, when he thought that Frank had traveled in many foreign lands, and met with scores of thrilling adventures before coming to Yale, yet never boasted of what he had done, never even mentioned those travels and adventures unless asked about them—when Harry thought of that he was stupefied.

From that night Harry Rattleton regarded Frank Merriwell with a feeling of awe that he could never fully overcome. He remembered how familiar he had been with Frank in the past, and was astonished by it.

Harry did not tell what he had seen down at the little mission in the slums; he kept it a secret. Frank Merriwell was not saying anything about it, and Rattleton thought it possible he did not wish it generally known that he was playing the Good Samaritan in such a manner.

Not that Harry thought for an instant Frank would be ashamed to have it known. He knew Merriwell well enough to be sure Frank would not do a thing deliberately that would bring the least sense of shame to his heart.

For a few days it seemed that a change had come over Rattleton. He was not the same rattle-brained fellow that he had been, and a new look of thoughtfulness was to be

seen on his face. Up to that time it had seemed that he had never paused to think seriously about anything.

Diamond, in the meantime, was watching Mason like a hawk. One day he said to Harry:

"The freshman is priming himself."

"What do you mean by that?" Rattleton asked.

"He is preparing for the assault on Merriwell."

"What makes you think so?"

"Something I saw last night."

"What was it?"

"I saw Mason stand up to the bar in Jackson's joint and drink whiskey till he was loaded."

"Wheejiz!" exclaimed Harry. "Did he get off his feet?"

"Not quite, but he was jagged, and he punched a fellow named Wiggins."

"Who is Wiggins?"

"A freshman."

"Did Mason hit him hard?"

"Hard enough to knock him down."

"Then the bully is up to his old tricks!"

"That is the way it looks from the road. It won't be long before he'll go on the warpath for Merriwell."

"What did Wiggins do that Mason struck him?"

"Called Mason a coward. Said Mason showed he was a coward by failing to lick Merry after getting out of hospital. I was watching it all, and I saw the devil leap into the big fellow's eyes. He smashed Wiggins a corker."

"Well," cried Harry. "I don't know as I blame him for that! A fellow can't stand everything."

"But think how mild he has pretended to be of late. He has been putting it on all the time."

"Perhaps he would not have struck Wiggins if he hadn't been drinking. A man is not responsible for everything he does when he is filled to the chin with whiskey."

Diamond scowled.

"I don't admire the way you stand up for Mason," he said.

"I can't help that," flung back Harry, growing excited. "If the fellow is making an attempt to become a man, I am going to stand up for him. There are plenty of others who will try to push him down."

"Is that an insinuation that I am trying to push him down?"

The Virginian was getting angry, and Harry was not desirous of trouble with Diamond, so he quickly said:

"Not that, old man; but you know I am right—you know Mason has so many enemies that he has little show to rise here."

"Let him keep in his place!" flashed Jack. "He has poor blood in him, and——"

"I know you stand by the old saw that blood will tell, but you do not know anything about Mason's father and mother. It is possible they may be fine people."

"Not on your life! There is a bad streak in one side or the other. Either it comes from his mother or his father. I'll wager something his father is a low creature."

"But there is some good in Mason—I'll bet my life on it. Within him the good is battling to overcome the bad."

"Well, it has a poor show with such a fellow."

"It has a poor show if everybody gives him a kick instead of a helping hand. Merriwell was trying to help lift him up, but we stuck our noses in and spoiled everything."

"You talk as if we were wrong in doing that."

"We had no misness to beddle—I mean, no business to meddle."

Diamond was thoroughly disgusted.

"Rattleton, you make me sick!" he cried. "Go lay down and die! There is a soft spot somewhere about you!"

Then he angrily walked away.

CHAPTER XII.

AN ACT OF COURAGE.

Diamond was fully satisfied that he and Rattleton had done a friendly act for Frank Merriwell. He could see no reason why they should have any consideration for the feelings of Hock Mason, who had never been anything but an enemy to both of them; but surely they were under the greatest obligations to Merriwell, and it was their duty to do anything in their power for him.

The natures of Jack Diamond and Harry Rattleton were so unlike that there was a constant clash between them, even when they were working to accomplish the same object.

As Jack walked away Harry wondered what he would say if he knew that Frank visited the little mission in the slums and mingled with the bummers and toughs who gathered there as if he were one of them.

"He'd think Merriwell crazy," muttered Rattleton.

That afternoon as Rattleton came out upon the campus, he saw a number of students guying a drunken bummer near the fence.

"What's that creature here for?" came angrily from Harry's lips. "It's a disgrace to let such wretches wander in here!"

He approached the group, but stopped suddenly when he obtained a fair look of the drunken man's face.

"Wheejiz!" gurgled Rattleton.

He had made a discovery. He had seen the man before.

"It's the vag who signed the pledge down at the mission the other night!" exclaimed Harry. "He's drunk as

he can be! It's plain Merry didn't do much good in this instance."

One of the students shied a chunk of snow at the tramp and knocked his hat off his head.

Cursing them all, the man attempted to pick up his hat, but rolled over helplessly.

The thoughtless students shouted with laughter.

"Hall's got him down!" cried one. "Alcohol, I mean."

"Say, old gent," called another, "what's the matter with you? Is the ground unsteady?"

"Are you drunk?" asked another, "or are you simply—drunk?"

Then one of them sang a verse of "Booze, Beautiful Booze."

The inebriated man secured his hat and attempted to get upon his feet, but when he was part way up, one of the lads ran forward and pushed him over.

He cursed at them again.

"I've got a son!" he cried, "a fine son who is here at this college! I've come to see him. Is he 'shamed to come out and see his father—his poor old father?"

"He ought to be, if he isn't," said one of the fellows at the fence. "I'm sure I'd be."

The drunkard sat up and shook his fist at them.

"Y're all a lot of devils!" he screamed. "I'm goin' to find m' boy, and I'll take him 'way from here. Didn't know he was here till yesterday. Where is my son?"

"Where is an officer?" cried one of the boys. "This wretch should be lodged for the winter where he'll have to work for his board."

"That's right," agreed the others.

The tramp began to cry in a maudlin manner.

"Whole world's down on me—always was!" he said, thickly. "World always kicks a man when he goes wrong—helps push him into the gutter. Don't have no sym-

pathy. Now my own son's 'shamed of his father, and don't dare to come out and see him."

Rattleton's heart was filled with mingled disgust and pity. He longed to help the poor old wretch up, but hesitated because he knew he would be guyed and jollied by the students. His courage failed him quite.

It was plain that the lads at the fence were touched by a feeling of shame at last, for they kept away from the drunken man, ceasing to torment him.

Across the campus came a straight, manly-looking youth. He espied the gathering at the fence, and he saw the man on the ground. Then he hurried toward the spot.

It was Frank Merriwell.

"What's this?" he exclaimed, as he reached the side of the old bumner. "You?"

The man looked up and recognized Frank.

"Yes," he said, thickly. "It's no use—drunk again! Broke m' pledge—can't keep it! Old man's gone to devil! Let him go! No use to try to help him!"

"Oh, we'll try again!" said Frank, his voice as tender as if he were speaking to a woman. "We won't give it up as long as there is life! We'll try again, my friend, and we'll win at last, I know we will!"

He helped the bumner to his feet, while the lads at the fence looked on in amazement.

"Oh, you're a good boy—a noble boy!" sobbed the man. "You ain't like devils there!" with a faltering, feeble gesture toward the group near by. "You are a man! They push a man down, you lift a man up. That's difference."

Some of the lads at the fence laughed, while some flushed with shame.

"Come," said Frank, speaking kindly to the unsteady wretch, "we will go away somewhere. Come with me."

"My boy," said the drunkard, weakly; "I want to see m' boy. He's here—goes to this college! Oh, I know it—

I found it out! He's here, and he's 'shamed of his old father—his drunken old father!"

"You do not want to see him now," came gently and firmly from Frank. "We'll find him by and by. Come away with me—won't you come with me?"

"Yes, I'll do anything for you! You've got a heart."

Then he tried to shake his fist at the group at the fence.

"Mocking devils!" he cried, hoarsely; "here is a man worth more than you all! There is more man in one of his fingers than in whole of you! You ain't fit to wipen shoes on his feet! You push man down; he lifts man up. Shame—shame on y' all!"

"Come!" urged Frank, gently forcing the man away.

"Yes, I'll go—for you. But I'm coming back. I'm going to see my boy who goes to this fine college, while his poor old father has no place to lay his head."

It was a strange sight to see Frank Merriwell assisting the drunken tramp across the campus and away from that vicinity. No one attempted to guy him, but all stared at Frank amazed.

All? No; Harry Rattleton was not amazed, but his face was crimson with shame when he thought how he had held back and failed to give assistance to the bumner, but Frank had not hesitated an instant.

"He is a thousand times the man I am!" Rattleton mentally cried.

CHAPTER XIII.

HOW FRANK CONQUERED MASON.

"Mason's on the warpath again!"

That was the report that was circulated. It created a sensation, although something of the sort had been expected for some time.

Mason on the warpath again meant that the big freshman was once more the brutal bully who had caused consternation among the students.

Mason was drinking. In the old days before his illness he had never drank anything more than an occasional beer or a glass of ale now and then, but now he was drinking whiskey.

It was the universal opinion that Mason was drinking whiskey to fire up courage to the point of tackling Frank Merriwell again.

It was seen that Merriwell and Mason no longer seemed on friendly terms. Why they had broken was not known. Diamond and Rattleton kept the secret.

Wiggins bore the mark of Mason's knuckles on his cheek, but he thought he was lucky to escape without receiving something worse than that.

Jackson's was a place occasionally patronized by students as well as the general public. In a back room above Jackson's, "Buster" Kelley, a professional bruiser, had rooms. Kelley was a bull-necked slugger with a record. He picked up not a little money by teaching college men fighting tricks and straight sparring. Kelley knew more about tricks than he did about scientific boxing. It was said that he could foul an opponent with greater skill than any living fighter.

Months before Kelley had been warned to leave New Haven, and, for some time, he had kept "shady." After a time, however, he became bolder, and almost any night he could be found loafing in Jackson's barroom.

It happened that Kelley was not present the night that Mason struck Wiggins, but he heard of it shortly afterward, and he publicly declared he would "t'ump der mug off'n der fresh bloke" the next time Hock cut up in Jackson's.

This was soon put in circulation, and each night a large number of fellows went to Jackson's, hoping to see a fight between Kelley and the freshman bully.

It was the universal opinion that Mason would soon meet his "finish" when he went up against "Buster," for Kelley would spring some sort of a trick on the college lad that would "do him up."

Mason kept away from Jackson's a while, and then, one night, he appeared.

Kelley was on hand and itching for a fight.

Mason drank whiskey by himself, and Kelley watched him. Word went out that there was "blood on the moon," and college lads came swarming into the place, hot to see the "scrap" they felt certain was coming.

Mason had "put himself up against the bar," and it did not take Kelley long to get up beside him. Kelley said nothing, but he watched Mason in a manner that was an open insult.

At last Mason accused the barkeeper of changing his whiskey and giving him a poorer brand.

"Think I can't tell poor whiskey just because I've pitched in a pint of it?" he growled. "Well, I can! This stuff is vile!"

"It is the same that I have been giving you all along," declared the barkeeper.

"Haw!" snorted Kelley, unable to keep still longer.

"Dat duck don't know whiskey from benzine! Shall I t'row him out, Jimmy?"

He asked this question of the barkeeper, but he thrust out his square chin and glared at Mason in the most approved bulldog fashion.

Mason turned and looked Kelley over.

"Throw me out—throw me!" he exclaimed. "You poor, deluded, yap-faced accident! You couldn't throw me out if my hands were tied behind my back!"

Kelley gasped for breath. He did not seem able to believe that he had heard aright.

"I—I'm Buster Kelley!" he roared.

"I don't care if you are Buster Thunder!" flung back Mason. "You won't melt things. There are others just as warm."

Kelley gave a howl and a leap, but Mason sprang sideways at the same time, and the bruiser did not fasten his hands on the freshman, as he had intended. Instead, he received a sledge-hammer blow on the ear that came near knocking him clean over the bar.

Kelley was a man who could stand punishment, and he turned as quickly as possible to get at Mason. He was just in time to get a smash in the mouth that sent him up against the bar once more.

The two blows Mason had struck were terrible ones, and would have knocked out an ordinary man.

Kelley was not an ordinary man, and the bar saved him from measuring his length on the floor.

Although dazed by the blows, Kelley managed to duck and avoid a third one.

But Hock Mason was aroused as he had never been before. He seemed a perfect fury. His eyes glared and his teeth gleamed beyond his back-drawn lips.

For all that Kelley escaped being struck when Mason swung at him the third time, he could not get away. Like

an infuriated beast the freshman followed the prize fighter.

Kelley tried to strike Mason, and did succeed in hitting him once, but, to the bruiser's astonishment, that blow simply seemed to make the collegian more furious.

The spectators held their breath. The fight had started so quickly and was so savage that they could do nothing but keep still and watch.

Kelley ducked again when Mason swung the fourth time, and then closed with the freshman.

"You have him, Buster!" cried the barkeeper. "Give it to him! Throw him out!"

Mason heard those words, and the snarl that escaped his lips was a sound that might have issued from the throat of an animal. He broke Kelley's hold, and swung him into the air, flinging the prize fighter bodily over the bar.

Kelley was put out of the fight by this, for he was stunned when he struck.

All that was bad and savage in Mason's nature seemed aroused. With his teeth grating together, his eyes glaring redly, and his breathing sounding hoarsely, he caught up a chair.

"Put your bouncer on me, will you!" he roared. "Well, I'll clean this joint out now!"

At this moment Mason was approached by a lad who had been passing, and was drawn into the place by the sounds of the fight.

It was Frank Merriwell.

Without the least hesitation, Merriwell walked straight up to the freshman, placed a hand on Mason's arm, and spoke, his voice being gentle and soothing:

"I wouldn't do it, old man. Put down the chair, and come with me."

Mason paused, with the chair poised in the air, his eyes turned on Frank. For a moment he glared at Merriwell as

if longing to smash him over the head with the chair, but it was plain a struggle was going on within his breast.

The others in the place watched in silent suspense, wondering what the result would be. Some of them felt sure that Mason would improve the opportunity to "do up" the lad who had been more than a match for him in the first struggle between them.

Harry Rattleton afterward declared that at that moment he would not have given a cent for Merriwell's chance of getting away with a whole head. Still, knowing the danger that menaced his friend, he could not lift a hand to aid Frank.

Merriwell did not shrink before the glare of Hock Mason's eyes. He stood there quietly, looking the former bully straight in the face, his hand still resting in a restraining manner on the arm of the infuriated freshman.

Gradually the look of fury left Hock Mason's face, which was suffused by a blush of shame. He lowered the chair, and then Frank spoke once more:

"Come on, we will leave this place. You could clean it out, but what is the use—you don't want to do it. Come, old man—come with me."

Not a word did Mason speak, but he permitted Frank Merriwell to lead him out of the room.

CHAPTER XIV.

MORE MYSTERY.

The witnesses of this remarkable scene were for a time dumb with amazement and wonder. They realized that Frank Merriwell had conquered again, but in a manner that made his victory quite different from the first one. And the second victory was the greater of the two.

Diamond and Rattleton were together, having come there to keep an eye on Mason. Harry was the first one to regain his power of speech. He turned to Jack, gasping: "What do you think of that?"

Diamond shook his head, still looking dazed.

"It's more than I can understand," he confessed. "Why, Merry conquered that fellow by sheer force of will."

"That's right!" exclaimed Harry; "and Merry can make a man of Mason in the same way. You and I are fools to interfere! Hereafter, I am going to keep my nose out of Frank Merriwell's business, and I think that is the best thing you can do."

To Harry's astonishment, Diamond did not resent these plain words. It seemed as if he was too dazed by what he had seen to be aroused by language that would have infuriated him at any other time.

After a few moments Harry slipped out of the barroom. He felt a consuming curiosity to know just what Merriwell would do with Mason.

To Rattleton's disappointment, neither of them was to be seen in the vicinity of the place.

"Frank has taken him away, so he would not be pinched if the police got onto the scrap," Harry decided.

He turned to re-enter Jackson's, but paused.

"No!" he muttered, suddenly seized by disgust of the place, "I'll not go back there. I've seen all there is to see. Buster Kelley got just what he deserved, and I am glad of it."

He walked away.

When he reached the corner of the next street, he saw at a distance two persons who were talking earnestly. He did not notice them in particular till he came close to them, and then he distinctly heard one of them say:

"He is calling for you, and it is your duty to go at once and see him. He is in a bad way, and may not pull through the night."

"I'll go," said the other.

The two were Frank Merriwell and Hock Mason.

Before Harry reached them they turned and walked swiftly away, still talking. Neither of them had noticed him.

With his eyes fastened upon them, Harry walked on and on. When he awoke to realize what he was doing he had followed Mason and Merry into the cheapest and most wretched part of the city.

"Great Scott!" he exclaimed, stopping suddenly. "Where am I going? I've been walking in a trance!"

Then he saw the two lads pause before a door that opened directly upon the sidewalk. That door was the entrance to a wretched building.

Merriwell took a key from his pocket, unlocked the door, and then Mason followed him into the building, the door closing behind them.

For some time after they disappeared Harry stood there, staring at the door and wondering why they had gone in there. At last he turned away, muttering:

"It's plain to me that I am not onto the whole of Frank Merriwell's secret. There are still some things about him that I do not know."

All the way back to South Middle Harry was thinking over what had happened that night. He thought of it in his room, thought of it after going to bed, and dreamed of it after falling asleep.

The story of the manner in which Frank had handled Mason in Jackson's saloon was circulated without delay, and it seemed that every man in college knew it before noon of the following day. It was the general opinion that Merriwell had conquered the freshman bully through fear; but a few fellows did not think so, contending that it was by a superior force of will that Mason had been controlled.

Diamond was silent. To himself he confessed that there was more in it than he could understand. At noon the sun was shining brightly, and the campus looked rather lively for that season.

Just when the largest number of students had gathered there in the sunshine, Frank Merriwell and Hock Mason appeared and walked across the campus together. They were watched by more than a hundred eyes, but they gave little attention to anybody, talking together in low, earnest tones.

Diamond saw them.

"That settles it!" he muttered. "Merry is done for now. I throw up the sponge."

But Jack could not entirely give Frank up. His curiosity was aroused, but it was aroused still more when he saw Mason and Merriwell leave the college together every evening at a certain hour.

It was not long before, one evening, Diamond sought Rattleton in the latter's room.

"Look here, Rattles, what do you think?" he cried.

"Dunno," grunted Harry, wondering what Diamond was driving at.

"You know Merriwell and Mason are chumming again?"

"Sure."

"Do you know they go somewhere together every evening?"

"Well, I have seen them."

"Know where they go?"

"Nit."

"I do."

"How do you know?"

"Followed them. Curiosity was aroused. Couldn't help it. Glad I did. Look here, old man, Mason is leading Merriwell into something crooked. This talk about Merry controlling the freshman is all rot. It's Mason who is the boss."

"What makes you think that?"

"What I saw. I followed them down into the meanest part of the city, and I saw them stop before the door of a wretched building. Mason took out a key and unlocked the door. Then they both went in, and the door was locked behind them. What do you think of that?"

"I knew about that all the time."

"Well, what do you think of it?"

"Think they have a secret. Think it is none of our business. Think we had better keep our noses out and let them alone."

"Eh? You don't believe in doing anything to save Merry?"

"Don't you worry so much about Frank Merriwell," advised Rattleton. "He can take care of himself, and he will not thank anybody for meddling with his business. I am going to let him alone in the future, and I advise you to do the same. That is all."

"I don't want your advice!" exclaimed Jack, springing up. "I don't thank you for it! You may do as you like, and I will do as I like. Good-evening."

Then he left the room and slammed the door.

CHAPTER XV.

THE OPEN DOOR.

It was Saturday afternoon. A dozen jolly students were on their way to witness a match game of billiards between two professionals in one of New Haven's popular sporting resorts. They joked, and laughed, and sang.

A wretched tramp staggered around a corner and ran into one of the party. The student gave the man a push that sent him tottering to the ground.

"Get out, you miserable old bum!" cried the angry student.

The tramp slowly arose to his feet. His face was ghastly pale, and there was a dead look in his eyes. With a mighty effort, he stood up before them, weakly saying: "Where is my boy—my dear boy? I want to see him for the last time. He's one of you student fellers. I must see him! I'm dying!"

"Dying for a drink," said one of the party, coarsely. "You are the old vag who made the scene on the campus. Where's a cop? You should be put away for the winter."

"I'll soon be put away for eternity," said the wretched man, gasping for breath. "I want to see my boy—my dear boy!—once more. Have pity on me!"

He stood in their way; they rudely pushed him aside.

A faint cry of anger came from the tramp, and, with a savageness that was astonishing in one who appeared so helpless, he struck one of the students in the face, knocking the fellow down.

Then the man turned and ran with astonishing speed.

For a moment the party was dazed by what had hap-

pened, and then the one that had been struck got upon his feet, swearing savagely.

"After him, fellows!" he cried. "I'm going to thump his face off!"

They started in pursuit of the running man. He looked back and saw them coming, and fear seemed to give him wings. He amazed them by his speed.

"Pretty hot pace for a dying man," said one of the pursuers.

Down into a wretched part of the town they followed him. They saw him fling open the door of a poor building and rush in.

"We've got him now!" cried one. "We'll find him in there!"

But suddenly out through the doorway stepped a person who closed it behind him. It was Frank Merriwell!

"Hold up, fellows!" rang out Merriwell's clear voice. "You can't go in here!"

"Stand aside, Merriwell!" shouted one of them. "We want that old bum!"

"No!" flung back Frank. "You can't touch him, fellows! He is a poor devil driven mad by rum."

"He struck Collins."

"He is not responsible for his acts. Have some sympathy for a fellow-being who was once a good man, honored, respected, loved by his family, and trusted by all who knew him. Drink has brought him where he is. I am sure you would not touch him if you were to go in and find him cowering before you. You are a dozen, all young, strong and healthy; he is one, old, weak and wretched."

Harry Rattleton was with the crowd. He came forward and took his place at Frank's side.

"Merry is right, fellows," he said. "We couldn't touch the old vag if we went in."

The others agreed, and soon they turned away, although they wondered that Merriwell had appeared at such a place and such a time to defend the man he had led off the campus.

Frank held Rattleton back.

"Come," he said, "you are my friend, and you shall know all the secret. Mason will not care."

They opened the door and entered. In a miserable room they found the old bumner stretched face downward on the floor. When they lifted the man to a hard cot, he opened his eyes, recognized Frank, and painfully gasped:

"My boy—bring him! Dying!"

Frank felt the man's pulse, and then turned swiftly to Rattleton.

"Go for Mason!" he commanded. "Find him and bring him here. On your way, send a doctor, and say it is a case of life or death."

Harry stopped to ask no questions, but departed in a hurry.

When Rattleton returned with Hock Mason, Frank was fanning the man, who lay gasping on the cot. The doctor had not yet arrived.

Mason fell on his knees beside the cot, crying brokenly: "My father—my poor father!"

"My boy—thank God!" fluttered the faint voice of the man. "I tried to live long enough to see you again. Now—now I am willing to go!"

"But you shall not die! You shall live and take the cure—you shall be a man once more."

"No use—too late! My boy, don't drink! I broke your mother's heart, ruined our home, became a wandering wretch on the face of God's earth! My boy, don't—don't drink!"

"Father, I will not—I give you my pledge here and now, that never again shall a drop of liquor pass my lips!"

"Keep it, boy—keep it! Always remember your pledge to your dying father! It will soon be over. Bury me quietly; don't disgrace yourself by letting the world know. Promise you will not."

"Father——"

"Promise—promise!"

"Anything, father!"

"Now I shall go easier."

He turned his eyes on Frank Merriwell, and a faint smile came to the face of that wretched bummer.

"He was the first to show me the way. Oh, he is a noble fellow! He is a true Christian, for he practices more than he preaches. It was his voice that stirred my rum-deadened heart for the first time in years. My boy—my boy! all I could ask is that you might be like him! Take him for an example, my boy. You will—never—go—wrong."

The last words cost a mighty effort. Then the old man lifted himself a bit, seemed to look far beyond the bare walls of the wretched room, stretched out his hand, and whispered:

"The door—the door is open!"

He fell back stiffly.

The door had closed—forever!

For a long while after this there was silence in the room. Then Frank laid his hand on Hock Mason's shoulder.

"Shall I make all arrangements for the funeral?" he said. "I presume you want it to be a quiet affair?"

"Yes."

So Frank made the arrangements, and only a handful of people attended.

It was fully ten days before Mason returned to the college, he having obtained leave of absence through Frank's efforts.

When he returned he seemed so changed that all the boys wondered. Nobody, not even Jack Diamond, dared to say anything, either to Mason or to Frank.

The days went on, and Frank continued his studies.

It looked as if all was running smoothly at last, but in the midst of the college work Bruce Browning brought news to Frank that disturbed our hero more than mere words can tell.

CHAPTER XVI.

BROWNING AND MERRIWELL.

"Say, Merry."

Frank looked up from his book.

"What is it, Browning?"

The big fellow lazily turned on the couch.

"Nearly everybody is more or less of a fool," he said; "but some fellows are bigger fools than others."

"What are you driving at?" asked Frank, puzzled.

"I know two of the biggest fools in college," declared Bruce, with a certain languid emphasis.

"Think it? Name them."

"Jack Diamond."

"Eh? Who's the other?"

"Harry Rattleron."

"What are you driving at?" Merriwell again asked.

"What's the matter with Diamond and Rattleron?"

"They are chumps. Both going it again."

"Going it? How?"

"Poker."

That aroused Frank.

"You don't mean they are playing the game?" he asked, flinging the book aside.

"That's what," affirmed Browning; "and they're being swindled after the same old style."

"Well, I am not surprised that you should call them fools," declared Frank, rising to his feet. "I thought they had learned their lesson."

"Hold on," said the big fellow, lighting a cigarette with a pocket-lighter, which he carried to save him the labor of scratching matches. "Haven't told you everything yet."

"What else have you to tell?"

"Can't guess the gang they're playing with?"

"I don't know. There are a dozen poker crowds."

"Well, they are not playing with the swell crowd."

"I presume not. The game would be too steep for them."

"You know where they used to play?"

"Jackson's joint?"

"Sure."

"But neither Diamond nor Rattleton would go there to play poker now. The decent fellows have quit that place. It's too tough."

"Diamond and Rattleton have been pulled into the gang that plays at Jackson's. They are playing with Harris and the others."

"Harris?" cried Frank, astonished. "Why, they know he is crooked! They know he stood in with that fellow Harlow to beat his friends, the meanest thing any man can do! You must be mistaken, Bruce! Neither Jack nor Harry would sit into a game with that fellow."

"But they are playing with him, just as hard. He has hypnotized them—or something."

"How do you know this?"

"Fleming told me. You know he is friendly with Thornton, and Thornton plays with that crowd. Fleming was asked to come in. He wanted to know who played and Tom told him."

Frank seemed relieved.

"If the story came through Tom Thornton I shall not put much stock in it," he said. "Tom is rather irresponsible. He would like to be square and go with a decent crowd, but he is easily influenced, and so those cheap fellows lead him off. I know he cannot be depended on to tell the truth at all times. You remember he was in with

Hartwick and my enemies last year, but redeemed himself by quitting them and putting me on to their plots."

"I think you are rather hard on Thornton, Merry," said Bruce.

Frank whistled his astonishment, and then broke into a merry laugh.

"Well, I like that!" he cried. "Everybody has been telling me I was too soft with fellows who have tried to injure me, and now you say I am too hard on one of them who was in the gang once. By Jove! that is a relief! Really, I like it! Do it again, old man!"

Then Frank laughed again, and Browning brightened perceptibly.

"Huah!" grunted the big fellow, expelling a mouthful of smoke with the sound. "That's a relief."

"What's a relief?"

"To hear you laugh like that. You've been glum enough lately; ain't seemed like yourself at all. What's been the matter with you, Merry?"

"Oh, nothing," answered Frank, evasively.

Browning knew nothing of the secret held by Merriwell, Mason and Rattleton. He knew nothing of Frank's efforts to uplift some of the poor wretches who came to the services in a certain little mission in the poorest quarter of the city.

The work Frank had been trying to do, the misery and degradation he had seen, and the final death of the drunken parent had served to sober the light-hearted lad and make him thoughtful and serious.

Another thing happened that had caused Frank to seem more serious than usual was the fact that he was studying hard through the winter months that he might pass "exams." with flying colors, and have all the better opportunity to play ball and take an interest in other sports when spring came.

Merriwell was a fellow who carefully laid his plans for the future, and for that reason when the time came around for him to take part in sports and pastimes, if he went into them at all, he was able to do so in earnest. He had the time to spend, for he had "boned" hard to acquire time.

Browning knew Frank was not giving him a direct answer, but he also knew better than to be too inquisitive, so he did not put any more questions in that line.

"All right," he grunted, lighting a fresh cigarette from the butt of the old one. "Maybe nothing was the matter with you, but you have been acting queer. Still, you did ship that fellow Mason before all the fellows were queered on you."

"That's where you're wrong, old man," returned Frank. "Mason shipped me."

"Oh, come off! He was hanging to you, hoping to make himself popular that way."

"You misjudge him, Browning. That was not his object at all. He simply accepted the friendship I offered him.

"When he found it was injuring me because he came here to see me in my room, he quit coming. That's straight."

"Huah!" exploded Bruce. "You seem to be the only fellow who has a real good opinion of him."

"I think the time will come when I'll not be the only one."

"Well, he has been going pretty straight lately. Seems awfully sober, and never says anything to anybody."

Frank thought that Mason had good cause to seem sober, but he did not say so.

Browning finished the cigarette, and then, between yawns and groans, got upon his feet.

"Got to do some grinding myself," he declared. "Can't

stand it to be dropped again, and I'll have to dig for exams., or something will drop."

Frank laughed again.

"I should like to see you digging!" he exclaimed. "It would be an awe-inspiring spectacle. The only time for a year that I have seen you do anything was during our vacation trip. Then you were compelled to push a bicycle, walk or flunk."

"And I felt like flunking more times than I can remember, but I'd said I'd do it or bu'st, and so I stuck to it."

After chatting a few moments longer, the big student familiarly known as "the laziest man on earth," struggled to his feet and wearily dragged himself out of the room, leaving Frank to his thoughts.

When Browning had departed, Merry suddenly remembered that in the midst of their conversation about Diamond and Rattleton they had branched off onto something else, and had not afterward returned to the original channel.

That was like Browning, but to Frank it seemed strangely forgetful in himself.

"Perhaps I am studying too hard and keeping myself too close in my room," he said, as he walked up and down. "Sometimes I feel like flying. I want to shout, tear something, smash something; but I nail myself right down to my studies and bone till I am so tired I can do nothing but crawl into bed. I am killing my superfluous energy, instead of working it off. That hurts. If a fellow had brought me a piece of news three months ago same as Browning did just now I should not have forgotten it before we were through talking it over."

He continued to pace the room for some time, thinking this matter over. He realized that he was not like himself, and he resolved to get back into normal condition.

Then his thoughts ran to what Browning had told him

of Diamond and Rattleton. He remembered that neither Jack nor Harry had called on him often of late.

To Frank it did not seem possible that they could be foolish enough to again play poker with Sport Harris, after knowing that the fellow had at one time been implicated in a plot to rob his friends with the assistance of a card sharp.

But for the fact that Harris had begged in a pitiful manner, saying it would kill his mother if he had to leave college, it is certain he would have been driven out of Yale.

But Frank felt that it would be a fearful thing to ruin a young man in such a manner, and he had pledged all his friends to secrecy concerning the affair, thus protecting Harris.

Instead of feeling grateful for this, however, Harris had not forgotten that the exposure of the crooked work was made by Merriwell, and, in his heart, he hated Frank all the more. He had made a few feeble attempts to injure Merriwell, but each one had been a failure, and, at last, it seemed that he had decided the best thing was to drop it.

Despite the fact that Frank had pledged all the fellows to secrecy, something of the truth concerning the affair had dribbled out, as we know, and Harris was occasionally guyed or sneered at about the affair. Every gibe or sneer made him feel all the more bitter toward Merriwell deep down in his heart.

Harris had a particular friend in Walter Gordan, although at times he and Gordan had very little to do with each other publicly. Occasionally it would seem that they scarcely knew each other, so formal were they when they met, but all the while there was a perfect understanding between them, and they were on the best of terms.

Gordan was a two-faced fellow. He was not frank enough to come out and openly declare his dislike for Mer-

riwell. Instead of that, to a certain extent, he kept his rancor corked up in his heart, where it gnawed and gnawed, pretended to be friendly toward the lad he hated, and lost no opportunity to work him an injury if it could be done secretly.

Harris was the only man who came anywhere near knowing the full extent of Gordan's bitterness toward Merriwell, for Harris was the only man who received his confidence.

Of late Gordan and Harris had seemed more distant than ever toward each other. They seldom spoke or noticed each other, but whenever a poker game was going on at Jackson's and Harris was in the game, Gordan was somewhere around. Occasionally he played, but it was far oftener that he sat around and looked on, pretending to be "broke."

CHAPTER XVII.

GOOD ADVICE.

While Merriwell was thinking of Diamond and Rattleton, and asking himself why they had not visited him oftener, the door suddenly opened and the Virginian strode into the room.

"Hello, Jack, old fellow!" called Frank, cheerfully. "I was thinking of you this very minute."

"Hello," said Jack, shortly. Then he dropped on a chair and stared moodily at the floor.

Frank instantly saw that Diamond was not feeling as well as he might.

"What's the matter, old fellow?" he asked.

"Nothing," was the short answer.

Still Jack stared at the floor.

"He has been getting it in the neck," thought Frank. "That's what's the matter."

Merriwell attempted to talk of various things, but Diamond did not seem inclined to talk. Suddenly he looked up, saying:

"Lend me twenty dollars, Merriwell?"

Frank whistled.

"Why, of course——" he began, slowly.

Jack jumped up, his face flushing.

"Needn't if you don't want to!" he exclaimed. "There are others!"

"Oh, say!" called Frank. "What's the matter with you? Sit down, Jack Diamond! Did you ever know me to refuse to grant a favor to a friend who was a white man?"

"No, but——"

Jack hesitated.

"But what?"

"Oh, I didn't know but you were going to question me, and I don't care to be questioned."

"That is putting it on pretty thick, Jack!" protested Frank. "When one friend lends money to another, does he ask the other what he means to do with it—if he is a gentleman?"

"Oh, no, but——"

"Then don't you think——"

"I'll apologize!" cried Jack. "Hadn't a right to say such a thing—to you."

"Here, Jack—here is the money."

Frank counted out twenty dollars, which Diamond accepted with mingled eagerness and reluctance that Frank did not fail to note.

"Now," said Merriwell, "there was no reason why I should ask you what you meant to do with that money, for I know. If we were not the very best of friends, I would not say what I am going to say now. I knew when you came into this room that you had lost heavily playing poker."

Jack stared at Frank in astonishment.

"Are you a wizard?" he gasped, after some moments. "Did you read my mind?"

"Was I right?"

"Yes, but how——"

"Never mind how. I am sorry you are in the game again, but I am not going to preach."

"That's a relief."

"You are playing at Jackson's?"

"Sometimes," confessed Diamond, blushing.

"Harris is in the game?"

"Yes."

"That is what surprises me. Why should you play with him? You know he is crooked, and——"

"We can do him all right. He doesn't know how to put up the cards, or do anything else that he can't be detected in. It was Harlow who did all the tricks. Nobody is afraid of Harris. That fellow is a mark."

"Has he proved so lately?"

"Well, he has done pretty well, but it has been a case of luck—nothing more. Rattleton and I have watched him like hawks, and he hasn't had a chance to do anything out of the way."

"You think so, but that fellow may be sharper than you imagine."

"I tell you he is a bungler. We'll get at him and sink the knife deep pretty soon. That's what we want to do. Luck can't run his way always, and we are laying for him."

"I think you are making a mistake," said Frank; "but, of course, I don't know. I think I'll drop in sometime, and——"

"Don't do it, Merry! It's no place for you. Keep away!"

"Well," laughed Frank, "that sounds well from your lips! If the place is good enough for you, it should be good enough for me."

Diamond's face grew very red. He tried to explain that that was not what he meant, but made a mess of it. He was thinking all the time that Merriwell had, once on a time, confessed that card playing was his weakness, but he did not wish to say that he feared Frank would yield to that weakness. He could not find words to make his meaning plain without making it altogether too plain.

"It's all right," smiled Frank. "Go ahead, old fellow, and I hope my double sawbuck will give you luck."

So Diamond departed. When he was gone Frank sat

down and tried to study again, but his mind would wander, and he soon found it was useless.

"Can't do it to-night," he declared aloud, as he flung the book aside. "My mind is running to jackpots, flushes, full hands, fours and all that stuff. Great Christopher! how I would like to play a game of poker! Haven't played for a thousand years—more or less! If poker was anything but poker, I'd get into a game this night; but I know my weakest spot, and I am not going to play. All the same, I am going to drop down to Jackson's and see if Diamond and Rattleton are getting a fair show. I hate to think that they are being skinned by Sport Harris and his pals. It's ten to one they go down there and ball-up till they are in no condition to play a steady game. Then Harris works them easy. He has a cinch with them. He plays horse with them. They do not trot in his class. Frankie, it's your turn to look after Mr. Harris a little."

Merry went to the wardrobe and brought out his overcoat, but suddenly changed his mind and returned it to its hook.

"I won't take it, for it might bother me. If I drop in on the gang and pull off my overcoat, it will arouse suspicion. If I drop in on them and keep my eyes open, it may happen that an overcoat would be an incumbrance."

He pulled off his jacket and drew on a heavy coat in its place. This he buttoned tightly around him, drew on his gloves, took his stick, and left the room.

On his way to Jackson's, Frank's mind was full of many schemes. A fancy came to him that made him laugh outright.

"I'll do it!" he exclaimed.

No one had ever seen Merriwell take a drink of liquor, but when he entered Jackson's barroom he seemed to be pretty full.

"Everybody have something with me," he called. "Ball-up, gentlemen, ball-up!"

There were but four persons besides the two barkeepers in the place. Two of those were freshmen, but they knew Merriwell, and stared at him in astonishment.

The men behind the bar knew him also, and they were surprised, for never had he been known to take anything stronger than ginger ale at that bar.

"What will you have?" one of them asked.

"Whiskey," replied Frank; "whiskey, old chap! Something to warm me up. It's cold enough to take the plating off a door knob this evening, and whiskey is the only thing that will set a fellow's blood moving."

Then he again asked the others what they would have.

"Blamed if he isn't steaming!" said one of the freshmen to the other.

"That's what," nodded his companion. "When these temperance chaps do start, they are terrors."

Then they got up against the bar and said it would do them proud to drink whiskey with Mr. Merriwell—Mr. Merriwell, the famous full-back, the great baseball pitcher, the all-around athlete. They were honored by an invitation from Mr. Merriwell—Mr. Merriwell, the dead-game sport, the jolliest fellow in college, the whitest man alive. Would they drink with him! Well, would they? Rather!

Merry was jolly enough for anything. Almost any one would have been willing to swear he had been "looking on the wine when it was red." His tongue seemed a trifle thick, but he told a funny story as no one but he himself could tell it. He told it with assumed gravity that seemed of the half-intoxicated order.

That story was funny. The barkeepers roared over it. Afterward they wondered what they had laughed at, for when they tried to tell it themselves it seemed flat and tame. They did not realize it was all in the telling.

The freshmen came near bursting blood vessels. They shouted with laughter. One of them got on the right side of Frank, and the other got on the left. It was the first time they had been given an opportunity to get so near the famous athlete. They improved it, they brushed elbows with him, one of them ventured to place a hand familiarly on Frank's arm.

The drinks were before them. Frank lifted his glass, the others lifted theirs. Then they paused, and Merry gave a toast. That was funny, too, and they all laughed again. Then they lifted their glasses to drink.

At that moment Merry did a very clever piece of legerdemain. Not a drop of whiskey touched his lips, although it seemed that he tossed it off at a gulp. When the others lowered their glasses, Merry was drinking the water chaser, and the whiskey was in the cuspidor that stood under the rail of the bar.

Then Frank seemed to grow jollier than ever. He told other stories that made those who heard them laugh. He sang a song and followed it with some artistic whistling.

One of the freshmen ordered drinks. Frank was asked what he would have.

"Tom gin," he said. "Going to shift. Been drinking whiskey for the last hour. Don't seem able to get up an edge."

"He'll get up an edge if he mixes his drinks," said one of the barkeepers, speaking in an aside to his companion.

"Too bad he's steaming," said the other. "He's a fine fellow, and never has taken anything."

All but Frank took whiskey. The bottle of gin was placed before him, and he turned out a "stiff" drink in a glass. He was given water as a chaser, and turned that into another glass. Then, by a very simple bit of legerdemain, he changed the glass about, so that, when he came to drink, he took the water, instead of the gin. As the gin

was almost exactly the color of the water, this trick **was** worked with ease. The gin went into the same cuspidor that had caught the whiskey.

After this Merriwell seemed more hilarious than ever. He called one of the barkeepers aside and whispered in his ear :

"Some of my friends said they were going to sit into a little game down here to-night. Thought I'd come down. Can you let me in, old man?"

"Sure," nodded the barkeeper. "I'll fix that."

He pressed a button, and a young negro came in by a back door.

"Here, Pomp," said the barkeeper, "take this gent into the card-room where the little game is going on. He's all right."

"All right," nodded Pomp. "Right dis way, sar."

Frank followed. He slipped a silver half-dollar into Pomp's hand, and the darky was obsequious.

Merry knew the way to that card-room. He had been there before, but he had taken what he considered the best method of getting in there without trouble. His plan had worked finely.

Pomp rapped on the door in a peculiar manner. A bolt shot back, and Frank stepped in, while the colored boy said :

"Heah is a gemman dat wants teh come in."

"Hoop-la!" cried Merry, dancing about the room. "When I want to come in, you can't keep me out. I'm hot stuff! If you touch me, you'll get scorched!"

Three lads were playing at a table. Two others were standing up. All regarded Merriwell in astonishment.

Sport Harris was one of the three at the table, Diamond and Rattleton were the others. The two standing were Walter Gordan and Sydney Gooch.

There were poker chips on the table, and Harris had

the biggest pile in front of him. He had shaved off his infant mustache, and, to Merriwell, his face betrayed his true character—that of a sharper.

On the walls were sporting pictures. There was a well-worn carpet on the floor.

Frank's face was flushed, and he made a false step when he stopped dancing about. He did it in a manner that instantly aroused the suspicions of Diamond and Rattleton.

Jack and Harry exchanged glances, and that one look was full of doubt and inquiry.

"Give us a hand!" cried Merry, thickly. "I want to get into that game! I've got money to burn, and I'm going to burn it in an open grate!"

CHAPTER XVIII.

FRANK GETS ONTO THE GAME.

"You can't get into this game!" cried both Diamond and Rattleton.

"What's matter?" demanded Frank. "Isn't my money good's anybody's? That's what I want to know."

"Yes," said Jack, quickly, "your money is all right, old man; but we are in for a little three-handed game of freeze-out, and I object to taking in another fellow."

"Anything 'gainst me?" demanded Frank, his imitation of an intoxicated person being perfect.

"No, it's not that, but——"

"Lemme into game?"

"No."

"All right, that settles it. Oh, 's all right—'s all right! My money's jesh good's anybody's money. I don't want to come in—wouldn't come in 'f you wanted me to!"

He pretended to be angry, and it was done in a manner that would have commanded the admiration of all if they had known he was simply acting. As it was, there was not a man present who did not believe Frank had been drinking.

Still, Rattleton was determined to know the truth. He pushed a button, and Pomp appeared. Harry whispered in the darky's ear, telling him to go find out if Frank had taken a drink of anything intoxicating at the bar.

Pomp departed.

Harris' eyes gleamed with satisfaction. Frank Merriwell had been drinking; he felt sure of that. Two more drinks would fill him up. If he could get Merriwell into the game and fleece him! What a revenge that would be!

Then Sport urged the others to let Frank into the game.

"Why should we be piggish if Mr. Merriwell wants to play?" he said.

Again Jack and Harry looked at each other.

Pomp returned and whispered in Harry's ear. Rattleton grew pale, and a look of pain came to his face.

So Frank Merriwell had taken to drinking at last! Harry nodded to Diamond, and Jack's white teeth gnawed at his lip.

Both objected to letting Frank into the game. Harris insisted. Both Diamond and Rattleton declared they would not play.

Then Merriwell said he did not want to break up the game, and refused to come in anyway.

Harris was disgusted, for he feared he had lost a fine opportunity to fleece the fellow he hated above all others at Yale. But he decided to keep still and wait. Perhaps Merriwell would want to come in later; perhaps a party would gather so that a game could be made up, even if Diamond and Rattleton did pull out.

Frank ordered a drink. He told Pomp to bring him some gin. Harris took whiskey. Gordan and Gooch took the same.

Diamond and Rattleton refused to take anything.

"Won't even drink with me, eh?" cried Frank, fiercely. "All right! I know who m' friends are!"

When the drinks were brought, Jack and Harry watched Merriwell closely—too closely to suit him, for he saw he was not going to be able to deceive them unless he was exceedingly crafty.

On the wall was a picture of John L. Sullivan. Frank lifted his glass, crying:

"Here's to you, John L., old boy. You're a back number, but you were a daisy in your day."

Then the picture seemed to say:

"That's all right. Corbett found there were others. Drink hearty."

Every eye was turned toward the picture, and then Merry turned the gin into a cuspidor, so that, when they looked back, he was drinking the water.

All the wool on Pompey's head seemed to rise on its hind legs. The darky became a sickly yellow, and his knees trembled.

"Gemmans," he chattered, "did Ah hear dat photum-graf speak? Oh wuz hit an optical delusum ob mah ears?"

Harris grinned.

"That was pretty slick," he said. "Who is the ventriloquist?"

No one present was more innocent in appearance than Frank, and it seemed that he was too intoxicated to do a trick like that. He seemed to have all he could carry and stand on his pins.

"Too bad!" muttered Rattleton, as Frank walked over and gravely stared at the picture of Sullivan. "Wouldn't believed it if I hadn't seen it."

Diamond was silent, but his thoughts were busy.

"Oh, it won't do him any harm," laughed Harris, trying not to show his satisfaction. "He has stuck to soft drinks a blamed sight longer than I thought he could and run with the set he has been in."

Both Jack and Harry felt that this was a thrust at them, but they could not resent it. At that moment they were thoroughly ashamed of themselves, for they felt that they were in no small degree responsible for the condition of their friend.

The game continued, but Merriwell did not seem to pay the slightest attention to it. He looked at the pictures and talked to himself.

Gordan and Gooch were fully as delighted as Harris, for

they disliked Frank. If anything, Gooch was more two-faced than Gordan. He had few friends in college.

There were more than three chairs in the room, but Gooch and Gordan did not draw them up to the table. They stood and talked to each other in low tones.

After a time Merriwell sat down on a chair, and it was not long before he seemed to fall asleep, with his head hanging over on one side.

"He's off," laughed Harris. "What a surprise it must be to the stomach of such a temperance crank as he has been!"

"He's never been a crank!" flared Diamond. "He has not chosen to drink, but you know he has not been meddling with fellows who wanted to do so."

"Oh, don't fly off the handle like that!" said Harris. "Merriwell is all right. He'll be all the more popular now that he has got so he will take something."

"He is purchasing added popularity at a big price," said Rattleton.

Merriwell heard all this, but still he seemed to sleep on.

The game continued. As it was freeze-out, Harris resolved to clean Diamond and Rattleton out as soon as possible. He won all the large pots that he stayed on. It was a remarkable thing that when he was beaten, he dropped his cards without betting. It made no difference who dealt, he seemed to read the cards.

Disgusted, Diamond called for a fresh pack. Still, every time Diamond or Rattleton got the "top hand," Harris dropped his cards. That left Jack and Harry to "buck" against each other, and both were eager to get at Harris.

Gooch and Gordan watched the game. Gordan pretended that he wanted to come in. He asked Gooch for money, but Sydney declared he was "broke."

All the while, though seeming to be asleep, Frank was watching the players and the two on-lookers. He was

confident that, in some way, Harris was fleecing Jack and Harry. How the trick was being done was what he meant to find out.

Not one in that room suspected Merriwell was watching him. But, if Frank had come there without seeming to be intoxicated, all would have suspected his purpose. Once before he had exposed a card sharp, and he had done the trick very cleverly.

Now, as Frank pretended to sleep, he saw how it came about that Harris always knew when to bet and when to drop his cards.

Gordan and Gooch were "tipping him off." They stood so that they could look at the cards held by Diamond and Rattleton, and it was easy enough for them to signal Harris.

Frank's blood began to seethe in his veins. It was with difficulty that he kept still long enough to discover the meaning of all the signals employed by Harris' allies.

At last, he could stand it no longer. A big pot was on the table. Diamond held three aces, and Rattleton had a flush. Still, Harris was raising every time it came his turn.

Merriwell arose to his feet, advanced quickly, and grasped Gordan and Gooch by the collar. Then there was a crack as he rapped the heads of the two rascals together.

CHAPTER XIX.

HARRIS AT BAY.

"Ouch!"

"Leggo!"

"You hurt!"

"Wow!"

The startled rascals uttered the exclamations as Frank Merriwell shook them, one with each hand, as if they were children.

The trio at the table were no less startled. Frank's action had been so sudden and unexpected that they were dazed for a moment.

"Help!" cried Gooch.

"Take him off!" squawked Gordan.

"He's crazy!" exclaimed Harris, starting to his feet.

"Sit down, Harris!" rang out Frank Merriwell's clear voice, as he flashed a look over his shoulder at the chief rascal.

Harris dropped back into his seat as if those words had knocked him down.

At that moment Frank showed no signs of intoxication, although he had seemed so full a short time before. It was this fact that upset Harris as much as anything.

Jack and Harry were startled. They sat still some seconds, staring at Frank.

Harris jumped up again, crying:

"Get hold of him! He's nutty! What has he jumped on Gordan and Gooch that way for?"

"I'll tell you why I jumped on them," said Frank. "I did it because they are a precious pair of scoundrels who are helping you fleece my friends!"

Harris turned pale. Once before this same keen-eyed youth had exposed him in a piece of rascality. Had Merriwell detected him in his crookedness a second time?

Harris knew the only course was to put on a bold face, so, with a pretense of mingled astonishment and indignation, he asked:

"What do you mean by that, Frank Merriwell?"

"Just what I said," came from Frank, as, with a snap, he cast the two accomplices reeling aside. "I am on to the dirty trick, Harris!"

"Be careful!" came threateningly from Sport, as he took a step toward Merry. "You'll find I am not ready to take such talk from a fellow who is drunk."

"I am not drunk, Harris," declared Frank. "Further than that I have not taken a single drink. I knew if I came here when I seemed to be sober you would be on your guard, and I could not catch you. That was why I made believe I had been drinking. I fooled you very nicely, and thus I was able to get on to your crooked work."

"You are drunk now!" exclaimed Harris, desperately, although he knew better when he said so. "We all saw you take a drink of gin."

"You saw me take a drink of water—nothing more. The gin went into that cuspidor when you turned your head at the time that John L. up there on the wall saw fit to make a remark in response to my toast. That, too, was a little ruse of mine, and it worked beautifully. You have been fooled this time, Harris, and you can't squirm out of it."

Gordan and Gooch were pulling themselves together, glaring at Frank in a manner that betrayed their mingled hatred and fear. Gooch picked up his hat, which had fallen to the floor, and restored it to shape, while Gordan tenderly rubbed his head.

Diamond and Rattleton were both astonished and relieved. They were astonished by Frank's sudden action and his words, and they were relieved to hear him declare he had not taken a drink of liquor. Instantly both Jack and Harry felt that Frank knew what he was doing and what he was talking about, but they wanted an explanation, and that was something Harris really did not want. How had they been skinned? It must be that Gooch and Gordan had been giving their hands away to Harris.

Sport grew paler than ever, but he continued to "put on a front."

"What are you driving at?" he hoarsely demanded.

"I am driving at you, my fine fellow! I want you to give up the money you have won from my friends."

"I refuse! I will not be robbed!"

Frank laughed.

"You are a nice chap to talk about being robbed! A few moments ago you were robbing my friends! That is what I mean! It was robbing them just as much as it would be to put your hands into their pockets and take their watch or money."

"Be careful, Merriwell!" grated the chief rascal. "You'll have to prove that!"

"Oh, I don't know! My word will go against a fellow like you. I saw your curs here giving you signals. I can tell their signals for two pairs, threes, a straight, a flush, full house and fours. They signaled to you, and you knew what was against you. That is how you knew enough to lay down your hand every time you were beaten."

"It's a lie!" snarled Harris.

"It's a lie!" faintly echoed Gordan.

"Yes, it's a lie!" weakly supported Gooch.

"It is the truth! Look, Diamond—look, Rattleton—

look at their faces! There is guilt for you! It proves my charge true without another word!"

Gooch betrayed guilt more than either of the others. Gordan made an effort to look innocent, but did not succeed very well, while Harris ground his teeth furiously.

"Are you going to let him circulate this story about us, fellows?" cried Harris, savagely.

"No," said Gooch, with an effort.

"No," said Gordan, with a little more spirit.

"But what can we do?" asked Gooch, helplessly.

"Go for him!" shouted Harris. "We'll go for him all together, and we can do him up!"

"That's right," said Gooch, but he edged away from Merriwell.

"Come on!" cried Gordan, with sudden rage. "No fellow can use me the way Merriwell has and not be sorry for it!"

"Stop!" exploded Diamond, jumping up.

"Stop!" roared Rattleton, also rising.

"Don't try to lay a hand on Merriwell," rang out Jack's voice.

"Don't try to put a finger on him!" shot forth Rattleton.

"If you do——"

"We'll do you!"

"Sit down, fellows—sit down!" laughed Merriwell, motioning for Diamond and Rattleton to resume their seats. "Why, I can polish off all three of these fellows. It will be easy, and I shall consider it a great piece of good luck if they will wade right into me."

Frank was in a dangerous mood. All the indignation of his soul had been aroused, and he felt like fighting at that moment. It was not often he felt that way, but he was a dangerous man when the mood seized him.

Gordan's courage suddenly wilted. He had heard

college. It is what he deserves, and I believe it is my duty to see that he gets his deserts."

Harris looked on sullenly while Diamond and Rattleton consulted together. He expected to lose the money he had won in such a crooked manner, and he bit his tongue with rage whenever he thought how he had been tricked and trapped by Frank Merriwell.

He had hated Merriwell before, but now he felt that he could kill the fellow without a qualm of conscience. All his bad luck had been brought about by Merriwell. Whenever he made a wager on anything Merriwell entered into the game somewhere and upset all his calculations. He remembered with overwhelming fury how Yale had taken the gridiron with a far weaker football team than Harvard, how he had bet everything he could raise on Harvard, and how Merriwell, who had not been expected to play, had gone in as full-back and proved the principal cause of Harvard's defeat.

And now, when Harris was doing everything to retrieve his fallen fortunes, once more Merriwell upset his plan and exposed his crookedness.

Walter Gordan felt quite as bad as Harris, but the time was past when Walter dared openly face Merriwell in anything.

Sydney Gooch, always foxy and hypocritical, never possessed courage enough to show his colors.

After speaking together, Diamond and Rattleton turned toward Harris, and the former said:

"Pick up that money, Harris, and put it into your pocket. You have won it in some manner, and we are not going to touch it."

Harris had not expected this, and now that it had come he hesitated. He suspected some sort of a trick.

"No!" he cried.

"You won't?" gasped Rattleton.

"No!"

"Why not?"

"I have been accused of beating you out of that money in a crooked manner. Take your money back! I will not touch a cent of it!"

Harris was playing a part now, for he hoped they would not take the money. He was making a bluff by showing indignation, hoping to restore his standing in their eyes in a measure, at least.

Frank smiled a bit. He could read the fellow like an open book, and he thoroughly understood Harris' game.

"You have been accused——" began Jack.

"But——" put in Harry.

Then both hesitated.

"It has not been proved," said Walter Gordan, quickly; "and it can't be proved. You won the money honorably, Sport, so keep it, I say."

"I say so, too," came faintly from Syd Gooch, who felt that he must say something to support Gordan.

"Very well," said Frank, quietly; "keep the money, Harris."

But Harris hesitated, fearing this sudden change in Merriwell meant another trap.

"No!" he huskily said, sitting down on a chair and thrusting his hands into his pockets. "Take out the money I won from you, Diamond and Rattleton. Next time I play I'll choose men who will not squeal when they are honorably beaten."

Diamond flushed and took a quick step toward the insulting speaker.

"Harris!" he cried, "if you accuse me of squealing, you lie! That is straight and plain enough. I do not care to be beaten out of my money by a card sharp and a crook, but I never cry baby when I lose fairly."

"Nor I," hastily declared Rattleton.

"Oh, well," said Sport, with a sneer, "I don't suppose you fellows are to blame for your friends. Some of them——"

Frank made a warning gesture.

"Better be careful, Harris," he said. "I have handled you gently so far, but there is a limit. If Mr. Diamond and Mr. Rattleton do not choose to take back their money, that is their business; but they may be satisfied all the same that you were playing a skin game with them. Take my advice, pick up your money and get out of here. You will not make anything by remaining to talk it over, and you may stir me up. In case that happens, you will not escape any easier than did your confederates."

"Don't you dare put a hand on me!" snarled Harris, starting to his feet and carrying one hand back toward his hip pocket.

Frank laughed.

"If I thought of doing so, you would not stop me by making that kind of a motion," he declared. "I don't doubt but you carry a gun, but it is not handy. Out West men who are liable to need a gun and need it in a hurry never think of carrying one around in such an awkward place, for they know the first movement in that direction is a warning to an enemy, and the chances are about ten to one that they will find themselves toes up before they can get their shooting-iron out for business."

"We're not out West," muttered Harris; "and I rather think I can draw quick enough to fix you."

"Why, you wouldn't have the nerve to use that gun after you drew it," declared Frank. "In fact, I don't believe you would have nerve enough to draw it. Anyway, I am coming at you—right now!"

He walked swiftly toward Harris, who fell back

against the wall, crying out for him to stop, but did not draw his revolver.

Frank followed the fellow up to the wall, and then, with a scornful laugh, turned his back on him in the most careless and disdainful manner and walked away.

Harris looked as if he longed to leap like a panther on Merriwell's back, but it was plain he did not dare do it. The very fact that Frank gave him such an opportunity by turning his back held Harris in check to a certain extent, for it seemed that Merriwell was eager for him to make an attack.

"That's all right!" he grated. "If Gordan and Gooch would stand by me, I'd——"

"What would you do?"

Frank turned and shot the question into Sport's face.

"I'd—I'd fight you!"

"Oh, well, it is easy enough to arrange that," said Merriwell, who seemed aroused in a manner that surprised Jack and Harry. "We can have a little set-to——"

"When I fight you, I want fair play."

"You shall have it."

"No! If I were getting the best of you, your friends here would interfere. If you were getting the best of me, neither Gordan nor Gooch would lift a hand to help me."

"Is that what you think? Well, we can fix it. We'll run them all out of the room and lock the door. You and I will be in here together, and I'll agree to lick you till you beg before they can break in to us."

Harris wilted.

"I don't propose to let you arrange it," he said; "but I am going to get a crack at you before long. I will tell you that now. You want to look out for me."

"I know what you will do. You'll try to get a crack at me behind my back. That is brave! All right! I am

not alarmed, but I warn you now that I have stood all I can from you. I spared you once, but I shall not be so merciful the next time. If you try anything dirty on me, I'll give you no rest—I'll drive you out of Yale!"

Sport shrank a bit closer against the wall, and his face hardened.

"So be it!" he cried. "We understand each other now. I know what you will try to do, and you know I am your enemy. The time of avowed hostilities has come. You are a popular man, but it is possible that you have estimated your popularity too high. Even you can be reached, if the trick is done right."

"Then it is to be open war?"

"Yes."

"Good enough! I see your finish!"

"Oh, I don't know! You are not the only cake of ice in the cooler, and you won't last forever."

Without paying any further attention to Harris, Frank turned to Jack and Harry.

"Come, fellows," he said, "let's get out of this place. Take my advice, and stay away from it."

Harris picked up the roll of money. Without speaking to Gordan or Gooch, he walked out of the room. They followed close at his heels, both seeming glad to escape as easily as they did.

When they were gone, Diamond turned to Frank, confessing:

"You were right about Harris, old man. I would not take your warning then, but now I see we were foolish to play poker with a chap of his caliber after knowing he had been in a crooked deal once."

"Let poker alone, fellows," said Merriwell, soberly. "There is no one who likes the game more than I, but I keep away from it, for I know what will happen if I allow myself to chase it. There is nothing can get such a hold

on a fellow as poker, and nothing will do him greater damage, unless it is drinking."

He stopped short, feeling that it would not be best to "preach."

His words were not wasted, and they seemed all the more impressive from the fact that both lads knew he spoke the truth when he said no one liked the game more than he.

"I'd like to get back some of the money Harris has won from me lately," said Harry.

"Well, we can't win it back," said Jack, "so we'll have to let it go."

"That is a sensible conclusion," said Frank.

"But there is one thing we can do," cried Jack.

"What's that?"

"We can help crowd that fellow out of Yale."

"Sure!" eagerly exclaimed Harry.

Frank shook his head.

"Don't think of it, fellows," he said.

"Why not?"

"It would not be right for all of us to get onto his neck at once. He would say it was a case of persecution because he won money from you, and it would seem that way."

"I don't believe he'd dare say anything of the sort," said Harry.

"Well, even if he didn't, it would seem like three on one, and I like to see any fellow, no matter who or what he is, have a fair fighting show. There is to be open hostilities between Harris and myself. Let us alone—let us settle it."

CHAPTER XX.

A SLEIGHING PARTY.

"Art dreaming? awake! and the stars shall pale,
While I bathe in the light of thine eyes;
Art musing? ah! shake off fancy's veil,
For thy face needs no disguise.
The sea sleeps calm in the light of the moon,
The stars guard heaven's gate;
Then tell me not, Love, I have come too soon,
For, queen of my love, I wait.

"The sea sleeps calm in the light of the moon,
The stars guard heaven's gate;
Oh, tell me not, Love, I have come too soon,
For, light of my soul, I wait.
Beloved, beloved, beloved, thy loved one waits."

A fresh fall of snow lay on the ground, and the moon was high in the heavens. It was a perfect night—just the night for a sleighing party.

Out of New Haven drove a merry party, twenty in all. They were in single sleighs and double-seaters. The bells tinkled merrily, and the voices of the jolly lads and light-hearted girls mingled sweetly in the song Frank had started.

Never had Frank seemed in better spirits. He was handling the reins over a "spanking span," and Fanny Darling was at his side, while on the seat behind him were Bart Hodge and Bessie Blossom.

Bessie and Mable Creighton had come on from Philadelphia to visit their brothers at Yale, and Fanny had accompanied them. Just why she wished to come she had not stated, but there were those in the secret who knew she would not have taken the trouble but for the fact that Frank Merriwell was a student of "Old Eli."

Bessie Blossom had been Bart's favorite at the time the "Yale Combine" was stopping in the Quaker City, and she seemed well satisfied to have him as a companion on this ride.

The sleighs strung out along the road, and there was laughter and calling from sleigh to sleigh. Frank started the singing, and Fanny Darling joined in. He leaned closer as he sang, and she did not draw away. The verse ended, and she lifted her eyes to his, the moonlight falling full on her face. He was looking down at her.

"What a splendid singer you are, Mr. Merriwell!" she exclaimed. "You really sang that as if you meant it."

"As if I did!" cried Frank, softly. "Well, didn't I?"

"Perhaps so, if you were thinking of some one else."

Fanny knew all about Inza Burrage and Elsie Bellwood. She had heard Frank confess that he cared more for Elsie than all other girls. He had not tried to deceive her, and for that reason her admiration for him was something more than mere friendship, even though she realized fully that Frank could be nothing but a friend to her.

"Oh, I don't know!" smiled Frank. "Life is young, you and I are together. Why should we think of any one else to-night?"

Her head drooped, and she nestled a bit nearer.

"I don't know," she murmured. "Perhaps it would not be so very wicked, just for to-night."

Then Frank started on the second verse of the song:

"Art sleeping? ah, no! for the night is still young,
Still far too young for sleep;
Not yet hath the glow which the day god flung
Been lost in the western deep.
Art absent? not so, it cannot be,
To-night is the night we meet;
While breathing and free, thou knowest well,
This night I am at thy feet.

"The sea sleeps calm in the light of the moon,
The stars guard heaven's gate;
Oh, tell me not, love, I have come too soon,
For, queen of my soul, I wait.
Beloved, beloved, beloved, thy loved one waits—
Thy loved one waits."

Silence, the tinkle of the bells, the crunch of snow under the feet of the horses, the softly smiling moon, the world asleep beneath its robe of white—a night for young hearts and for whispered words of love.

The words of the beautiful song stirred Fanny Darling's soul. She knew that she loved Frank Merriwell—there was no doubt of it now. But she must hold it down—crush it back.

Then came the thought that it was for but one night. Why should she not be happy that night, at least? They might never be together again like this.

"Thou knowest well, this night I am at thy feet." Frank had sung those words, and she felt that he had sung them to her. For one night they belonged to each other. She would try to be as happy as if she expected that night to last forever.

So she felt his arm about her, and she was happy. She thought of his heroic act in saving her from horrible disfigurement, from possible death by fire, and she realized that, deep in her heart, he had been the one hero of her life ever since that evening.

A thousand times Fanny had longed for an opportunity to square the great debt she owed Frank. She had felt that she could die for him. Once he had thought her frivolous and cruel, and she longed to show him how much he had misjudged her.

"No whispering," called Bessie Blossom, with a light laugh. "It isn't polite in company, you know."

"It can't be that Mr. Hodge is doing his duty," Fanny

tossed over her shoulder. "If he were you would not notice what is going on in front."

"I may not be doing my duty, but I am trying to hold my own," said Bart, as he clasped his arm still more tightly about the girl at his side.

Frank gasped.

"Never knew you to say anything like that before, old man," he declared. "How long since you have taken to joking."

"That was no joke," returned Bart. "I am not letting words go to waste."

"How about your arm?" laughed Fanny.

"Well, there are others."

Some one struck up a college song, and the entire party joined in the chorus.

"Where are we going, Merriwell?" asked Bart.

"Oh, out to some old farmer's somewhere in the country. Pierson has an uncle out here somewhere, I believe, a staid old codger who will drop dead when we all drive into his yard and pull him out of bed, for it's ten to one he'll be abed when we get there."

"Oh, but this is a jolly lark!" cried Fanny. "I'm awfully glad I came on to New Haven with you and Mabel, Bessie."

"Don't you think college fellows are just the nicest fellows in the world?" asked Bessie.

"Of course they are, and Yale fellows are the nicest college fellows in the world."

"Oh, there are cheap fellows in Yale," said Frank. "There is one in this very party. I don't care to name him, but I was sorry to see him in this crowd."

He was thinking of Sport Harris.

CHAPTER XXI.

UNCLE ASA AND AUNT PRISCILLA.

Farmer Asa Stebbins had attended to the chores for the night. He had cared for the cattle, bedded down Nancy, the old farm horse, locked the stable and betaken himself to his cheerful fireside.

When supper was eaten, Uncle Asa smoked his pipe, while Priscilla, his good wife, industriously knitted away at a pair of warm socks she was making for her husband. Conversation came at intervals. The cat purred on the hearth.

Uncle Asa looked over the last weekly paper as he smoked. He had read it all once, but, for want of something else, he read some of the most interesting items over again.

At length Uncle Asa cleared his throat and laughed softly to himself.

"What's the matter with you, father?" asked his wife. "What do you find in the paper that's so funny?"

"Oh, here's an item about them college chaps over at New Haven, but it wasn't that I was laughin' at."

"What was it, then?"

"I was thinkin', mother."

Aunt Priscilla did not ask any more questions, for she knew her husband well enough to be sure he would tell what he was thinking of quite as soon if she kept still as if she pressed him. After a time, the old man laughed again, in his dry way, observing:

"What a jokin' set of fellers them college chaps be! Alwus tryin' to have fun with somebody."

"'Cording to what I've heard, them chaps carry their jokin' altogether too fur sometimes," said Aunt Priscilla.

"Oh, well, boys will be boys, you know. Now if our Jimmy had lived to grow up, I'd wanted him to go to college and git his eddycation finished. I never had many advantages myself, and——"

"I don't know as it's any great advantage to any boy to go to college and wear long hair and break his collar bone playin' football. That's 'bout all them college chaps seem to do."

"They do have fun," said Uncle Asa, chuckling again. "Now, I remember 'way back years ago a prank they played on an old farmer that lived somewhere out in the country. That was before they had put up all them new buildin's. The old State House was standin' then. It was the greatest joke."

The old man shook with silent laughter, and his wife looked at him sharply, wondering that he should be so amused.

"You know them college chaps have a fence down there," the farmer pursued. "They consider it their sacred property. There was another fence back in them days. The boys roosted on that fence jest as they roost on the one they've got now. Well, this farmer I'm tellin' you of drove into town and hitched up his hoss to their fence, while he went off to 'tend to some business.

"Ho! ho! ho!" laughed Uncle Asa. "The hoss cribbed away at the top of that fence, and when the student fellers come out from recitation they saw him hitched there and trying to eat their fence. They didn't like that, and they got together an' set about concoctin' some sort of a plan to punish the farmer for darin' to hitch his nag to their sacred fence."

The old man pulled at the pipe a moment, quite un-

aware that it had gone out. There was a whimsical look on his weather-tanned face.

"Purty soon they struck onto a plan," he continued. "They drove the team over to the State House and unhitched it. The buildin' was not in use at that time, so what did them darn boys do but lead the farmer's hoss in and take him right up the stairs. That's right, mother—they dare-devil boys done it. There was a flight of stairs leadin' right up to the roof, which was purty near flat, and out onto the roof they took that hoss."

"Land sakes!" exclaimed Aunt Priscilla, putting down her knitting. "Do tell!"

"Fact," chuckled Uncle Asa. "Then them young rascals took the farmer's waggin all to pieces and carried it up there piece by piece and put it together again."

"Well, I declare!" exclaimed the listener.

"When they got the waggin all together, they harnessed in the old hoss and hitched him to the chimney. When this was done, they came down and waited for the farmer to come back.

"It was a monster funny sight to see that team up there on the roof of the old State House. Folks stopped and stared at the team, and then pinched themselves to see if they was awake or asleep and dreamin'. A crowd begun to gather purty soon.

"The farmer had considerable business to 'tend to, and he jest stepped into a saloon and bought him a pint of somethin' or other, and he nipped away at that now and then. When he got through with his business he was feelin' jest a little bit how-come-you-so. Then he started for his team.

"When he got long to the fence there was a crowd of student fellers and other folks, but not a sign of his team could that farmer see. He began to think the hoss

had got unhitched and wandered off, so he asked some of the crowd if they'd seen the team.

"One of them student fellers said he had seen the hoss wanderin' off by hisself goin' over toward the State House. Then the farmer he happened to look up the way all them laughin' folks was lookin' and he saw his team."

Uncle Asa slapped his knee and laughed outright.

"B'gosh!" he cried, "I don't s'pose that farmer ever was so 'stonished before in all his nateral life. He gasped for breath, rubbed his eyes, staggered backward, and set right down on the ground. He couldn't b'lieve his eyes.

"Say," he asked, "do any of you folks see a hoss and waggin up there on top of the State House? or be I twisted?"

"When he was satisfied that the team was there, he was more 'stonished than ever, and his 'stonishment increased. He hadn't never known his hoss to climb up on roofs before, and he kinder wondered if the old nag had been drinkin', too. Them student fellers laughed and joked the farmer, and all the street urchins guyed him. Arter a while he rekivered enough to get up and go after his team, but he had to pay some men a good big pile to get it down for him, and they had an awful time with the hoss, for, though the animal had walked up stairs all right, it didn't want to go down. They had to back the nag down, and it was night before the farmer got started for home. He knew his wife'd give it to him for stayin' in town all that time, and he swore off takin' anything in the way of strong drink that very day. He ain't never touched a thing but cider sence."

Aunt Priscilla looked sharply at her husband.

"How'd you know all about this, father?" she asked.

"Oh, I heard of it," answered the farmer, evasively.

"Who was the man?"

"I don't jest exactly remember what his name was now," said the old fellow, hastily rising. "It's time to go to bed, mother."

"How long ago did this happen, father?" persisted his wife.

"Quite a while—quite a while. Don't remember jest the number of years. I'm goin' to bed."

"Your memory's gittin' shorter and shorter. It's remarkable how short it is when you don't want to remember a p'int."

Uncle Asa paid no attention to this shot, but put his pipe on the mantel, made sure the door was locked, wound up the clock, looked after the fire, and then picked up the lamp.

At that moment he paused, lamp in hand, and listened. There was a sound of sleigh bells.

"Wonder who that is," he speculated. "This last snow's made powerful fine slippin'."

Aunt Priscilla rolled up her knitting.

"Somebody's been to town, that's all," she said.

"Hark!"

There was a sound of youthful voices singing sweetly in the clear night air.

"Sounds like there was a lot of 'em," said Uncle Asa. "Young folks do have good times, mother. We was young ourselves once."

"Yes," said his wife, "but young folks never went skylarkin' in my day the way they do now."

"Keep still, mother! I really believe somebody's drove into our yard."

"Mercy sakes! At this time of night! It can't be!"

"I'm sure of it! Hear them voices! There's lots of 'em. What can they want?"

There was a rap on the door. Uncle Asa put down the lamp, and Aunt Priscilla was in a flutter of excitement.

'As soon as possible, the old man opened the door, and then into the room swarmed a flock of rosy-cheeked girls and laughing lads.

"Good gracious!" cried Aunt Priscilla, holding up both hands in amazement.

"Hey! hey! what's this mean?" gasped Uncle Asa, nearly dropping the lamp, which he still held in his hand.

"Hello, Uncle Asa!" called Paul Pierson, cheerily. "Thought we'd call and see you."

"So we called, don't you see," laughed Ben Halliday.

"Come in everybody," invited Jack Diamond, holding the door open.

"My clean floor!" faintly murmured the farmer's wife.

"What does it mean?" persisted the astounded farmer.

"It's a little surprise party, that's all," explained Pierson. "We knew you would be glad to see us, uncle."

"But we—we ain't prepared."

"Oh, never mind that. We're not fussy. We'll make ourselves at home."

"I should say so! I should say so! But, really, young gentlemen and ladies, I can't——"

"Now don't say that," cut in Paul. "We know you are delighted to see us. We want a place to stand our horses, and then we'll do what we can to eat up your best apples and drink a barrel or two of your good cider."

"Apples and cider!" cried one of the girls. "How jolly!"

Uncle Asa groaned.

"Oh, yes!" he said. "It's darn jolly! But I won't have it, I tell you. I refuse to be imposed upon like——"

"Now, uncle," said Pierson, "don't be foolish. If you are, I'll feel it my duty to tell Aunt Priscilla all about that time you found your team on the top of the State House in New Haven, and——"

"'Sh!" gasped the old farmer, in consternation. "How

in the world do you know anything about that? It was before your time."

"Oh, but I know all about it, and——"

"I wouldn't have mother know that joke was played on me for the world. I'd never hear the last of it as long as I lived."

This talk had been made aside, so the farmer's wife had not heard what was said. Paul chuckled with satisfaction, for he saw he had the old fellow at an advantage.

"We won't say a word about it, uncle," he promised. "All we want is some apples and cider, and, in return, we'll sing you some songs and do our best to liven you up. It's just what you need, Uncle Asa. The blood is running slow in your veins, and it should be quickened."

"Keep still about that joke, and I'll do what I can for ye," promised the old farmer. "We wasn't expectin' anything like this, so we can't do much; but I have got a few apples and some cider, and so——"

"That's all we want," declared Paul. "Just show us where we can stand our teams. Oh, you won't be sorry we called!"

Aunt Priscilla was so overcome that she could not say anything further. Her husband turned to her, saying:

"It ain't often we have such a lot of jolly young folks visit us, mother, so I vote that we do what we can to entertain 'em. You look out for the gals, and I'll take keer of their fellers."

The good woman saw her husband had capitulated, so she did not attempt to hold out longer.

"Come right in, gals," she said, beginning to smile. "If you'd let us known you was comin' we could have made it pleasanter, but we'll do our best now."

She urged them to take off their wraps, which they did. One of the lads found the wood and piled a fresh

lot upon the open fire, which quickly blazed up in a merry manner.

In the meantime, having lighted his lantern, Uncle Asa went out with the boys to care for their teams. It was nearly half an hour before they returned, and by that time the girls were well acquainted with Aunt Priscilla.

Then came apples and cider, and joking and laughter. The old farmhouse echoed to such merry sounds as it had not heard before in years.

Sport Harris was one of the party. He had been brought into it by one of the girls, and, rather than spoil a good time, those who knew just what he was did not object and refuse to take him along.

Harris kept pretty still, and the others made merry the same as if he were not present.

"These Baldwins are particularly fine," declared Uncle Asa, as he brought a big basket of his best apples out of the cellar, "but the gals may like them Tompkins sweetin's best. Gals alwus like sweet things, you know. Mother was a gal once, and she took to me because——"

"Now, father, don't be silly!" protested his wife, while the old fellow slapped his knee and chuckled.

The girls gathered about Uncle Asa and chatted merrily with him while they ate apples. Fanny Darling declared he was a dear old boy, and said Aunt Priscilla must have known a good thing when she saw it. This pleased the farmer, and he chuckled Fanny under the chin. Under the warming influence of the cider he did his best to flirt with her, which amused his wife.

Browning and Diamond gave the farmer's wife much of their attention. The big fellow fairly outdid himself, and he finally succeeded in getting the best of Jack in the contest for her favors.

But then Frank Merriwell stepped in, and it was not five minutes before he had won Aunt Priscilla's heart

completely. He counted apple seeds with her and drank to her health and happiness. Not to be outdone by Frank, Fanny counted apple seeds with Uncle Asa.

"Odd for a kiss and even for a miss," she cried.

It came odd and before he knew it she had kissed him on the cheek.

"Ain't goin' to wash my face for a week," laughed the old man. "I'll keep that as long as I can. Now, don't go to bein' jealous, mother! You'll have all the young folks laughin' at you if you shake your head at me and scowl like that. Mother never could bear to see me payin' any 'tention to the gals," he chuckled. "She knows I'm a fascinatin' old dandy, and she's afraid some pretty gal will steal me."

"Now, don't you flatter yourself, father," flung back Aunt Priscilla. "I might be able to catch a young man myself."

"You have captured one already," declared Frank.

Jack Diamond prowled around the house, and no one paid any attention to him.

Frank proposed a song, and all joined in merrily.

Song followed song.

Suddenly a strange sound broke on their ears.

"What's the matter with the cat?" cried five or six.

But the sound suddenly changed, and they realized some one had been putting a fiddle in tune. Now the rollicking strains of the "Devil's Dream" filled the rooms.

"Who's playing?" was the cry.

Diamond stalked in from another room, with an old violin under his chin, and the bow was literally dancing over the strings.

"Good! good!" cried many voices.

Fanny Darling could not keep still. She caught hold of Uncle Asa and waltzed him around the room till he was giddy and out of breath.

"I should think you'd be ashamed, father—you, a member of the church!" said his wife, reprovingly.

"I ain't a darn bit ashamed!" he cried, rather warmly. "David danced, and I ain't no better than David."

Jack played "The Last Rose of Summer," and rendered it beautifully, but it brought murmurs of protest.

"Don't play anything sad!" begged Fanny Darling. "Sadness comes to-morrow. Let's all be happy and gay to-night."

"I didn't suppose you wanted me to play nothing but dance tunes," said Jack.

"Dance tunes are what we want now. The livelier they are the better they will be."

"Why not have a dance?" proposed Frank Merriwell. There was a shout of approval.

Uncle Asa looked doubtful, and Aunt Priscilla was filled with dismay.

"Ain't no room to dance here," said the farmer.

"But there is room out on your stable floor," said Frank. "We will go out there and have a jolly good dance."

This was received with cries of delight.

Uncle Asa attempted to protest, but Paul Pierson was at his elbow, saying:

"If we don't dance, we may get to telling stories. If we tell stories, I may forget and tell about the time you found your team on the top of the New Haven State House."

"Go ahead," said Uncle Asa—"go ahead and dance in the barn. I don't care."

CHAPTER XXII.

THE DANCE IN THE BARN.

Uncle Asa and Aunt Priscilla refused to have anything at all to do with the dance. They refused to go into the barn, but they furnished the merry party with two lanterns and two lamps, and told them to go on and dance.

"Take keer not to set the barn on fire," warned Uncle Asa. "I'm goin' to build a new one next summer, but I don't care to have the old one burned down."

"We will be careful," assured Frank Merriwell, "Don't have any fear about that. I will assume all responsibility. If your barn burns, Uncle Asa, I'll pay for the building of a new one."

"If I warn't a church member, I'd go out and have a good time with ye," declared the farmer; "but I don't dare do it now. It would raise a scandal."

"Goodness, yes!" exclaimed his wife. "Deacon Tucker would have us pulled up for it. We'll stay right in the house, father."

Out to the big barn went the laughing boys and girls. They swept the wide floor clean, hung up the lanterns and placed the lamps where they seemed all right.

Then Diamond mounted to a seat on a high wooden block, tuned up the old fiddle again, and called:

"Select your partners for the first waltz."

A moment later the fiddle began to talk, and the dancers were whirling merrily on the floor.

Since arriving at Uncle Asa's, the girl who came with Harris had seemed to shun him, as if she were offended, and it happened that Sport was left without a partner. He looked on sullenly, chewing his tongue. All the

others were having a good time, but he was not enjoying it much. He envied them.

Frank was waltzing with Fanny Darling, and they were the most graceful couple on the floor. With a sneer on his face, Harris kept his eyes upon them. He saw Frank bend his head and whisper something in Fanny's ear, saw her blush and press her cheek against Frank's shoulder.

"Oh!" grated Harris; "that Merriwell is the dickens with the girls. I can't understand why all of them take to him. Now that girl with him is a peach. She is the liveliest girl in the party. If I could catch her—but I can't! I'd like to cut Merriwell out. Wouldn't that be great!"

He gloated over the thought.

"There's nothing like trying," was his final decision. "I'll wager something Fanny Darling doesn't know about Merriwell's other girls. If some one were to tell her—I'll try it."

Then he watched for his chance to reach Fanny.

In the meantime Uncle Asa and Aunt Priscilla were growing restless in the house. They could hear the sound of the fiddle, and that was quite enough to warm the blood in their old veins. Uncle Asa took another big drink of cider, going into the cellar for a special "brand," which he had not brought forth for the young folks. That cider was aged, and it had been kept in a whiskey barrel. As Uncle Asa himself declared, "There was an all-fired kick to it."

The cider warmed the old man more than ever. He could not keep still.

"Mother," he said, "it seems to me I'd better go out there and look out for them lights."

"Now, father, you had better stay away."

"Them young folks are monst'rus careless sometimes.

We don't want to get burned out of house and home to-night."

"I don't see how you came to consent to such doin's, father. If it gets out, there'll be a scandal in the church. Deacon Tucker is powerful strait-laced."

"Deacon Tucker is an old busybody!" said Asa, rather warmly. "If he'd keep that long nose of his out of other folks' business it'd be a mighty fine thing."

"Be careful, father! You shouldn't talk about a brother in that way."

"I don't care—it's the truth."

Uncle Asa was like a mettlesome colt. He absolutely could not keep still. He went to the window and looked out toward the barn.

"Mother," he said, "I can't stand this. Think of all them lights out there. If one of 'em should be upsot. I'm goin' out there!"

"Then you wait a minute till I git my shawl."

"Why, what be you goin' to do?"

"Asa Stebbins, do you think I'm a fool?"

"No, mother—no, no!"

"Well, I'm not going to let you go friskin' round among them young gals without I'm on hand to look after you."

Then they looked at each other, and Asa broke into a laugh.

"Gracious, mother!" he cried; "I do believe you are jealous! Well, come on."

He put on his hat, and she threw a shawl over her head. Then away they went to the barn, from whence came the sound of merry laughter and lively music.

The dancers were whirling on the floor when the farmer and his wife entered the barn by a side door which led to another door that looked out upon the floor. This second

door they opened, and the sight they beheld caused their old eyes to sparkle.

"If we was young again, I'd never mind what the church said," murmured the farmer, in the ear of his good wife.

"Nor I, Asa—nor I," she murmured, in return. He rubbed his hands together.

"It's a good sight to see, now ain't it, mother? It's better than medicine. Seems to me the rheumatism that's been botherin' me all winter has completely left. I tell you, mother, we've made a mistake by not havin' more young folks round us these last years. Young folks keep old folks from growin' old, and you know anybody's jest as old as they feel and no older."

"But the way you act and talk, Asa, I should think you warn't more'n thirty."

"Twenty, mother—not a day over twenty. And you're lookin' younger and handsomer to-night than you have before for ten years. I'll bet the best cow I've got that we can go on there and show them youngsters some capers that will open their eyes."

"Don't talk of it, father. Think of Deacon Tucker."

"Hang Deacon Tucker! He's an old hypocrite, anyhow!"

"Why, father!"

"Come on, Priscilla!"

She hesitated.

At that moment Frank and Fanny Darling saw them there in the door. A word passed between Frank and Fanny, and, a moment later, they were besieging the old folks.

"Come, Uncle Asa!" cried Fanny; "you must dance with me."

"And you will not refuse to dance with me, Aunt Pris-

cilla—I know you won't," said Frank, in his most persuasive manner.

The old farmer and his good wife cast one last doubtful glance at each other.

"Deacon Tucker will say——" began Priscilla.

"I don't care a rap what Deacon Tucker says!" exploded the farmer. "If he says too much to me, I'll punch his head! Come on, Priscilla!"

Then, laughing gayly, Frank and Fanny drew them upon the floor and whirled them away to the enlivening strains of music.

Sport Harris had been watching every move.

"That's one way that Merriwell makes himself popular," he muttered. "He will fool around with old folks just as quick as with young people, and he always seems to be laughing. How I hate that laugh! Sometime I'll make him laugh out of the other side of his mouth."

Bending over the old violin, Jack sawed away till the entire party was tired enough to stop.

As soon as the dance was over, the boys and girls gathered around Uncle Asa and Aunt Priscilla and congratulated them on the graceful manner in which they had acquitted themselves.

"Oh, that was nothing!" declared the old man, puffing for breath. "Wait till we get our wind, and we'll show you some quirks you never saw before. Hey, mother?"

"We might, but it's sure to get to the ears of Deacon Tucker, and——"

"Old Nick take the ears of Deacon Tucker! If you say Deacon Tucker to me again to-night, I'll do somethin' that'll be sure to get me churched!"

After a short pause, Jack struck up again, and the aged couple had the entire floor to show the young folks how dancing was done in their day. They whirled about with the old heel-and-toe, bowed low, whirled and bowed again

and again, while every evolution was received with bursts of applause.

When the lads and lassies could remain quiet no longer they again swarmed onto the floor, and the merry dance continued.

The opportunity Harris sought came at last. He found Fanny Darling alone.

With all the politeness he could command, Harris approached the girl.

"I beg your pardon, Miss Darling, I wish to compliment you on your dancing. I think you are the most graceful dancer I have ever seen."

"Thank you."

Fanny said it shortly. There was something about this fellow that she did not like.

"But why do you dance with that fellow Merriwell all the time?" asked Sport.

"I do not dance with him all the time."

"Nearly all the time."

"Besides, I don't know why you should call him 'that fellow.'"

Harris smiled in a significant manner.

"You do not know him as well as I know him," he said, insinuatingly.

"Why don't you dance?"

"I have not danced yet because I haven't had the opportunity to dance with the one I most desired."

"I am sorry."

Fanny made a move to pass him, but he placed himself directly in front of her.

"You are the one I wish to dance with, Miss Darling," he said. "You are so graceful. I will show you I am quite as good a dancer as Merriwell, though I may not be able to say so many soft things."

Her face flushed.

"I don't think I care to dance with you, sir," she said. That brought the color to Harris' face.

"Don't care to dance with me?" he hoarsely muttered. "Why not?"

"Is it necessary I should give reasons?"

"You might do that much, at least."

"Then I will. I do not like the manner in which you spoke of Mr. Merriwell as 'that fellow.' Frank Merriwell is a gentleman."

"So that is it!" sneered Sport. "I knew I was right when I said you did not know him very well."

"By that I presume you mean to insinuate that he is not a gentleman?"

"I don't care to say anything more."

"You have said quite enough! I am sure he is too much of a gentleman to make insinuations against any other fellow behind that person's back."

"Oh, I understand what you mean!" grated Harris.

"I trust you do!"

"I understand it, and now I am going to tell you something more about Mr. Merriwell."

"I do not care to listen."

"You must!" hissed Sport, hurriedly. "I know he has been making love to you. He is trying to fool you into believing that he really cares for you. Don't take any stock in him. Already he is engaged to two girls. One of them, Inza Burrage, was in New Haven last fall. Any of the fellows can tell you about her. The other one is down in Virginia somewhere. That is the kind of a double-faced sneak Frank Merriwell is!"

"Mr. Harris," said Fanny, coldly, "you have quite over-shot the mark. I know all about Inza Burrage and Elsie Bellwood."

"You do know—how?"

"Mr. Merriwell told me about them, like the honorable fellow that he is."

"Told you he was engaged to them both?"

"No, he is engaged to neither of them, although he may be sometime."

A sneer curled Sport's lips.

"So that is what he told you! Well, Frank Merriwell is showing himself a liar, as well as a hypocrite!"

A hand fell on Harris' shoulder.

"Were you speaking of me?" said the voice of Merriwell, himself. "I fancied I heard my name."

Harris whirled. Frank was looking him straight in the eyes.

"Yes," answered Sport, with husky defiance, resolved not to show the white feather before the girl, "I was speaking of you, sir."

"What did you say? Do you mind repeating your words?"

"Not in the least. Take your hand from my shoulder, and I will repeat them."

Frank's hand dropped.

In a moment Fanny stepped between them.

"Not here—not now!" she panted. "You must not fight here! Think—think what it would mean! It would ruin the party. You have better judgment than that, Frank."

Frank bowed.

"We will not fight here and now," he said. "Perhaps Mr. Harris will repeat his words later and elsewhere."

"I shall be pleased to do so," said Harris.

Fanny took Frank's arm, and they walked away, leaving Sport to eat his heart out with bitter fury.

"Oh, how can I strike him?" muttered Harris. "I have tried to hurt him by telling that he was drunk in Jackson's saloon, but no one seems to believe it. There

must be a way to get at him. When I find it, I will get at him hard. I hate him so much that I could kill him! Yes, I could kill him!"

His face was black with the stormcloud of passion. All the evil in his nature had been aroused, and, at that moment, the good which dwells within the breast of the lowest human being had been crushed down and almost obliterated by the bad in Harris.

He made no further attempt to dance, but remained by himself, speaking to no one. He was plotting, plotting, plotting.

For more than an hour the dance continued. Uncle Asa and his wife danced several times, but they found it tiresome after a while, and they became content to sit side by side, holding each other's hand and looking on. Their faces beamed with pleasure.

Big Bruce Browning danced three times, which was a real marvel. He fairly outdid himself in gallantry.

Diamond played all the tunes he knew, and then played them over and over. Some of the dancers sang to the music.

But the evening could not last forever, even though Fanny Darling wished that it might. The time came at last when Diamond broke his E-string and found he could not splice it out. Then the dance was over, and the boys and girls returned to the house.

"Uncle Asa," said Paul Pierson, "we have enjoyed ourselves more than we can tell, and so I am not going to say another word about——"

Here the farmer made some warning gestures behind his wife's back, and, laughing heartily, Paul continued:

"No, I'll not say another word about anything. You need not be afraid of that."

"Thankee—thankee kindly," said Uncle Asa. "It has been a pleasant evenin' for mother and me. We won't

fergit it soon, and we've made a diskivery. We have diskivered that it's better to have young folks visit us once in a while than it is to take patent medicine. I've been pourin' down stuff to cure the rheumatism and rubbin' on liniment, but it ain't done half so much good as you youngsters have done for me to-night. Just you come again when you feel like it, and you may be mortal sure Uncle Asa and Aunt Priscilla will be glad to see ye."

"That's so," said his wife. "And we don't care very much what Deacon Tucker says about it, either."

"Gol darn Deacon Tucker," shot forth the farmer. "If he opens his trap to me, I'll tell him what I think of him!"

"Father," said Priscilla, "hadn't you better bring up a little more cider before they go? They'll want one more sip, and mebbe they'll want some apples to take with them."

"If they want a bushel of apples apiece they shall have them, and I don't keer if they drink up all the cider in the cellar."

Down the stairs went the old man, accompanied by two of the boys.

The girls began to get on their wraps.

"Where is Frank Merriwell?" asked somebody.

No one seemed to know.

One of the boys stepped outside the house. A moment later he excitedly shouted:

"Fire! fire!—the barn is on fire!"

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE FIRE IN THE BARN.

There were screams of surprise and fear, and the boys and girls rushed out of doors.

A red glow showed through the cracks of the great barn.

In the excitement no one missed Fanny Darling.

Fanny had seen Frank and Harris quietly leave the party after all were in the house and slip out. She felt sure they were going somewhere to fight.

As soon as she could get away without attracting attention, Fanny followed.

Outside the house she paused. Where had they gone? The horses had not been taken into the barn, but were standing in a long shed back of the house.

She hurried there, but did not find the ones she was seeking.

"Frank can whip him," thought Fanny; "but they must not fight and spoil everything now we have had such a good time."

She hesitated a moment, listening. The horses in the shed stamped impatiently, and then——

Was that a cry?

The sound seemed to come from the barn. A sudden chill seized the girl's heart. It seemed that fingers of ice closed on her heartstrings. A thrill of horror ran over her, and she stood spellbound. A conviction that some frightful thing had happened came upon her overwhelmingly.

Some moments she stood thus, and then she did some-

thing few girls would have dared to do. She hurried toward the barn and entered it—alone!

The moment she opened the door a smell of smoke came to her nostrils. That caused her to halt irresolutely. If the barn was afire, was it not her duty to run to the house and give the alarm?

A reddish glow showed faintly before her, and in the midst of it she saw a crouching human figure that came toward her.

“Frank! Frank!” she called, starting forward.

The door closed behind her.

There was a startled exclamation, and that crouching figure came at her with a rush, clutched her, held her.

“Miss Darling—here!” grated the voice of Harris. “You must get out of here! The barn is afire!”

“Let me go!” she panted.

“No! Get out—quick!”

“Let me go!” burst from her lips. “I know what you have done! Let me go! I will save him!”

“Don’t be a fool!” snarled the fellow. “The barn was set afire in some manner while the dance was going on. It will burn to the ground in a few minutes.”

“You set it!”

“You little fool! Why should I do such a thing? Don’t dare say that!”

“I do dare! I saw you coming here with Frank Merriwell! Where is he?”

“I don’t know. I see I’ll have to carry you out.”

The thought that Frank was somewhere in that burning barn gave her such strength as she had never known before.

“Wretch!” she cried.

Then she struck him in the face, using all her strength. He staggered backward, and his hold was broken. With

another cry, she ran toward the spot whence the fire was sending out that red glow.

"Frank!" she gasped; "you saved me once! Heaven give me strength to save you now!"

She flung open a door and was nearly stifled by a cloud of smoke. The fire was before her. In the midst of the smoke and flames she saw a groping figure.

Into that terrible place sprang the brave girl. She caught hold of that swaying form, half supported it, urged it toward the door. The smoke followed them out through the door, the flames sprang higher, and the barn was doomed.

Half fainting, Fanny managed to keep her wits about her long enough to find the second door. It was fastened!

Then she realized what Harris had done. Driven mad by the fear that his crime would be exposed by her, he had closed and fastened that door, shutting them in.

Fanny screamed for help. Voices answered her. She screamed again, and then, overcome by smoke, she sank upon the floor, while her companion helplessly leaned against the fastened door.

But those cries had been heard. Bruce Browning was coming. He was calling, but they could not answer him now. He tore open the door, and Merriwell fell into his arms.

As Bruce was drawing Frank out the latter faintly gasped: "Let me go! Fanny—save her! She is there!"

Fresh air came in by the door beyond, and Frank found some of his strength. He pushed Browning off. Bruce understood him, and sought for the girl. He found her, lifted her, and aided them both to reach the open air.

The barn burned to the ground, and, although it made a hot fire, the boys worked like heroes to save the house

and succeeded, aided by the wind, which blew all the sparks away.

Frank had recovered and led them in the work of fighting the fire.

When it was all over, and there was no longer any danger that the house would catch, a sad and sober party gathered in the old-fashioned dining-room.

"It's a judgment upon us, mother!" said Uncle Asa, sadly.

"How did the fire catch, Merry?" asked Diamond. "That is where the mystery comes in."

"It did not catch," declared Frank. "It was set!"

Cries of astonishment burst from the listeners.

"Who would do such a thing?" they asked.

"The worst enemy I have in the world. He intended that I should perish in that fire, but I was saved by the heroism of Miss Darling, who came to my rescue. But for her, I should not have been able to escape, for I was completely bewildered and overcome by the smoke."

Then Frank told of his trouble with Harris. He told how, when the others had entered the house after the dance, he had returned to the barn with Harris.

"I think he really meant to fight me," said Frank; "but I was foolish enough to think he would do it in a square manner. I gave him a chance by being off my guard for a moment, and he caught up a pitchfork and struck me over the head with it. I partly turned and saw him strike, but I could not dodge the blow. It must have knocked me senseless. I believed Harris thought he had killed me, and then, overcome by terror, he set the fire in order to cover up the crime. When I became conscious there was fire all around me, and I was stifling with smoke. I could not find my way out, but then Miss Darling came to my rescue."

The boys uttered cries of anger.

"Where is Harris?" they demanded.

Harris had disappeared, and it was found that he had cut one of the horses free and escaped.

"What will you do, Frank?" asked Jack Diamond.

"I will put Harris behind the bars! He shall find that I am aroused at last!"

But Merriwell was not given an opportunity to punish Harris, for the fellow did not return to New Haven. Officers were sent out after him. They found the horse in Derby, and it was evident that Harris had taken a train there. The officers were not able to trace him.

Frank always declared he did not believe Harris really meant to kill him at the start, but, having struck him down in a moment of mad fury, the fellow believed he had committed murder. Then it was he tried to hide the crime by setting fire to the barn.

To Frank it seemed that the most dastardly act of all was the fastening of the door behind Fanny Darling, so that she, too, was shut into the burning barn.

It was some weeks after the night of the sleighing party that Uncle Asa and Aunt Priscilla sat alone by their fireside, both looking sad and overburdened.

"Next Sunday, father," said the good wife, "Deacon Tucker is going to prefer charges against us in the church."

Uncle Asa's under lip hung down, but he did not say a word.

"Brother Tucker says we were punished for our sin by the burning of our barn," sighed Aunt Priscilla.

"So he's goin' to try to punish us some more by gettin' us church'd. That's what I call true brotherly love, mother!"

There was a knock at the door, and a neighbor

handed in a letter, saying he had brought it along from the post office.

Uncle Asa got out his spectacles, rubbed them with his handkerchief, and slowly adjusted them to his nose.

"Postmarked New Haven," he said, as he scanned the envelope. "Wonder who it's from? Smart sort of writin' that."

"Well, why don't you open it?" asked his wife, sharply. "Don't set there starin' at it like a blind owl!"

The envelope was opened, and Uncle Asa drew out a sheet of paper and a check for five hundred dollars. For some time he sat and stared in speechless amazement at that check.

"Good gracious!" cried Aunt Priscilla, all a-flutter. "Why don't you read the letter!"

So Uncle Asa slowly read:

"DEAR UNCLE ASA: I suppose you have sometimes felt resentful toward the party of young people who were responsible for the burning of your barn. It is probable you have thought they did not care for your loss, but you were mistaken. We have raised five hundred dollars among us to aid you in building a new barn, and I send you a check for the amount with this letter. Hoping it will be sufficient to remunerate you for your loss, I remain,

Yours respectfully,

"FRANK MERRIWELL."

"By gum!" gasped Uncle Asa, as he again stared at the check. "It's too good to be true!"

Aunt Priscilla began to cry with joy.

"Oh, father!" she said; "it don't seem that the Lord can be so set against us, no matter what Deacon Tucker says."

"Darn Deacon Tucker!" shouted the old man, jumping to his feet. "He kin go to grass! I'm goin' to build a new barn, and when I get it built, I'm goin' to have

them same young fellers and gals out here to dance in it!
We'll have more fun than we did before! I say darn
Deacon Tucker!"

CHAPTER XXIV.

OUT FOR A CRUISE.

Spring!

All through the long winter the only green thing to be seen on the Yale campus was the festive freshman, but now, on this mild, sunny April day, which was a promise of June soon to come, a few blades of grass were struggling to appear.

It was a day to bring everybody out. For the first time one could realize that winter was really a thing of the past.

At noon the campus swarmed and the fence was lined with roosters. The juniors came out and smoked their big English pipes, and did their best to imitate the graveness and dignity of the seniors. The sophomores loaded their line of fence, joking, laughing and guying the freshmen. And the freshmen gamboled like young colts just turned out to pasture, betraying their absolute "newness" by every word and act.

Big Bruce Browning smoked in lazy abandon, leaning against a post, feeling far too tired to climb to a seat upon the top rail. Bink Stubbs was whittling with a brand-new knife, while Danny Griswold whistled a rollicking tune. Dismal Jones actually wore an expression on his face that was as near perfect satisfaction and happiness as anyone had ever seen on his long countenance. "Lucy" Little,

with a necktie "loud enough to jar the bricks out of South Middle," was doing his best to see how many packages of cigarettes he could smoke in five minutes.

Everywhere the talk was baseball. Who would make the team? Would it be as strong as the year before? and would they win out from Harvard?

It was pretty certain Harvard would have an exceptionally strong team. The material to choose from was better than ever before, and Harvard was "making a brace" in all directions. Yale had won the last football game from Harvard more by the wonderful work of one man than by the superior strength of her eleven, and the Cambridge lads were thirsting for revenge.

The man who seemed to stand head and shoulders above all others in Yale sports and athletics was Frank Merriwell. But Merriwell had become a "greasy grind" during the winter, and there were those who prophesied that he was satisfied with his fame, and would retire on his laurels. It was even reported that he was ambitious to be valedictorian, and it was known that he could go to either Bones or Keys, as he might choose, which was a most remarkable state of affairs, as there were hundreds of good men and true, with hearts full of ambition, who could not reach either.

All along Merriwell had refused to say anything about his plans, and he would not talk baseball. He had been drawn into the football game with Harvard through force of circumstances, and against his inclination, so it was not strange that the general belief was that he might refuse to become the leading "twirler" for Yale that season.

It was generally conceded by Merriwell's friends and foes alike that his refusal to play would be a great blow to Yale. Hugh Heffner and Dad Hicks, the old timers, were gone, and Merriwell was the only man left who had been tried by Yale and not found wanting.

True, there was some new material. Walbert, an Andover man, was a promising candidate; and Haggerty, who had come to Yale after being dropped at straight-laced little Williams for some thoughtless prank, was said to be a great "southpaw" twirler.

But what Yale wanted was steady, reliable material in which confidence could be placed. The new men might show up all right when the time came, but what if they did not? The "if" was in the way.

So baseball was the theme on this bright April day, and the enthusiasm which the game always arouses among the "cranks" was beginning to make itself manifest.

While they were talking of him, Frank Merriwell appeared. He looked trim and well-groomed. It was one of his peculiarities that he always looked as if he had just emerged from a bath.

Barely was Frank upon the campus before Harry Rattleton, his old-time chum, rushed up and caught him by the arm.

"Looking for you, old man—looking for you!" he excitedly sputtered. "There's something on sap—I mean something on tap."

"You know I never drink beer," smiled Frank.

"Never mind—t'ain't beer," Harry rattled on. "This is just the day, isn't it?"

"Just the day for what?"

"Cruise."

"What sort of a cruise?"

"On the sound. I've got a cat."

"A cat? Well, what has a cat to do with a cruise on the sound?"

"I mean a batcoat—no, no, a catboat! Bought her yesterday."

"Oh! I must say you are starting early."

"None too early. And this is just the day for a sail."

We can have a glorious afternoon on the sound. What do you say to it, old man?"

"Who is going?"

"Anybody you want. We'll take along Browning and Diamond."

"I don't think I ought to spend the time."

"Oh, come off! You have been cramming like a fiend all winter, and an afternoon's outing is just what you need. You can't say no. Think of the sport."

Frank did think of it. He knew it was true he had become a "dig," and he felt that a sail on the sound would do him good. It would serve as a relaxation for half a day, and he could return to his studies with fresh energy on the morrow.

All at once he turned on Harry, exclaiming:

"I am with you, old fellow!"

"You will go?"

"Dead sure. I'll be able to study all the better for it afterward."

"That's the talk, Merry! Who'll we take?"

"Name your own crew."

"Diamond and Browning."

"They're all right. What say if I get Hodge and take him along?"

"Get him. That will make just the right sort of a crew. I'll get a lunch, and we'll meet at the New Haven Yacht Clubhouse. The *Jolly Sport* is moored off the clubhouse. We'll all get down there as soon as possible. I know Browning and Diamond will go when they know you are coming along, Frank. You go for Hodge, and I'll look after the others."

In this way it was settled. Frank started to get Bart Hodge, another old chum, who roomed at a distance. Hodge had passed examinations successfully, and was a

Yale student at last. Rattleton made for Browning, who still leaned in solemn stateliness against the fence.

Rattleton and Diamond were on the *Jolly Sport*, getting her in trim, when Frank and Bart appeared.

"Where's Browning?" shouted Frank.

"Coming," Harry called back.

"So's Christmas, but it'll be a long time getting here. If you really expect that fellow to sail with us this afternoon, you should have brought him along."

"We can't waste the afternoon waiting for him," said Jack, impatiently.

Frank and Bart got on board the boat, and then Bruce appeared, perspiring and staggering under a heavy load, for he carried a huge basket in either hand.

"Dat the whickens—I mean, what the dickens has he there?" cried Harry. "Oh, I know, the lunch!"

"That's it!" exclaimed Frank. "We were smart not to think of that. But he has brought enough to provision the *Jolly Sport* for a week's cruise."

"Hurry up, Browning!" shouted Jack, testily. "We've waited long enough for you."

"Oh, fall overboard and cool off!" flung back the big fellow, who seemed a bit out of sorts himself from the exertion. "You're always in a hurry."

"What have you there, anyway?" asked Frank, as Bruce came on board.

"Beer."

"Beer?" shouted all the lads.

"Sandwiches."

"Then it's not all beer?"

"Most of it is."

"That's all right," said Diamond, beginning to look satisfied. "We'll take care of it."

"Oh, I don't know!" grunted Browning. "I brought

it along for myself. Supposed you chaps would bring your own beer and provisions."

"You don't mean to say you brought all that stuff in those two great baskets for yourself and no one else?"

"Why not?"

"How long do you think this cruise will last?"

"Can't tell about that."

"You'll divvy, or we'll put you in irons and cast you into the hold!" declared Rattleton. "I'm owner and captain of this vessel, and what I say goes. See?"

To this Bruce simply grunted.

The baskets were stowed as snugly as possible, and then Rattleton began to give orders.

"Haul away!" he cried. "Haul away on the throat halyards! Up with the peak! That's right. Slack off the sheet a bit, Diamond. Lay her a bit more to port! Steady, so!"

The tide was running out, and the wind was light, but the *Jolly Sport* seemed eager to get out into the sound, and was soon running down past an anchored fishing vessel at good speed.

"Well, this is great!" muttered Hodge, as he lay back comfortably, lighting a cigar.

Down past the fort in Indian Hill they slipped, steered across to the old lighthouse, and tacked into the sound.

"Hurrah!" cried Skipper Rattleton. "The breeze is with us, boys!"

Then he sang a snatch of "A Life on the Ocean Wave."

"What do you think of my singing?" he asked. "It's entirely by ear."

"Great heavens!" cried Merry, tragically. "That explains it!"

"Explains what?"

"Why, I didn't think it possibly could be by mouth."

Browning grunted. It was as near as he could come to laughing without exerting himself.

The boys took off their coats and prepared to enjoy life. All fell to smoking, with the exception of Frank.

"Going to pitch on the nine this spring, Merry?" asked Bart.

"I may," answered Frank. "I was practicing yesterday, and I threw the ball a mile."

"What's that? Threw a baseball a mile? Oh, come off!"

"You see, I threw it at a mark."

"Well?"

"I missed the mark."

"What of that?"

"Isn't a miss as good as a mile?" chuckled Frank.

Rattleton came near having a fit.

"If this keeps up," said Diamond, "there will be a lot of maniacs on board before the *Jolly Sport* sails back to New Haven."

As they passed a puffing tug, an old salt hailed them:

"Better be careful, boys," he called.

"Careful? What for?"

"There'll be a reg'ler nor'wester to-night. This is a weather breeder."

"All right, cap," returned Frank. "We'll be back before night."

And they did not think of the warning afterward.

Away down the harbor ran the *Jolly Sport*. The boys smoked, laughed, sang and joked. It was like a mid-summer day. They took the East Channel out toward Brandford Point, and then set their course toward the Thimble Islands.

After a time the wind freshened a little, and they put on their coats. The Thimbles were seen glistening in the bright sunshine. Harry had brought along a glass, and they took turns peering off toward the islands, of which

there are said to be three hundred and sixty-five, one for each day in the year.

The wind rose steadily till they had a "spanking breeze," and the catboat danced along right merrily.

"Perhaps we hadn't better try to make the islands," said Frank, but the others cried him down.

"What's the matter with you?" they demanded. "This is a beautiful breeze. Of course, we'll go to the Thimbles."

They were enthusiastic, for the way the *Jolly Sport* reeled along was exhilarating. Soon the glistening islands grew to bits of green and then took on definite shapes.

"Look at that schooner yonder," said Jack. "Isn't she a queer-looking craft?"

He pointed out a black two-master that was running up into the sound. There was something rakish about the slant of the masts, and the vessel seemed to creep over the water in a stealthy fashion. The boys watched her with increasing interest.

"Makes me think of some of the stories of pirate vessels," said Bart.

"Jingoes!" exclaimed Diamond. "She does look like a pirate!"

"But the days of pirates are past," said Harry. "Probably she is a fishing vessel."

"Guess not," said Frank. "She does not look like a fisherman. There is something mysterious in her appearance."

"You know Capt. Kidd ran in here something over a hundred years ago and landed on the Thimbles," Harry reminded. "He hid his vessel behind the rocky islands and buried his treasure where he and no one else has since been able to find it. His 'punch bowl' and initials remain to prove that he really did come in here."

"Imagine we are living in the days of pirates," said

Diamond, his eyes sparkling. "Imagine that fellow coming yonder is one."

"We'd be headed the other way, instead of bearing down to cross close under his stern," declared Hodge.

"I don't believe that schooner is much of a sailor, for all of her rakish appearance," said Harry.

"She's running under light sail," observed Frank. "It would make a difference if she were to crack on every stitch."

At the wheel a man seemed half asleep. Another man was at work forward, and those were all the boys could see.

"Don't believe she carries a heavy crew," said Browning, surveying the schooner with lazy interest.

Somehow or other as they drew nearer to the black vessel they lowered their voices and all seemed to feel an air of awe stealing over them.

"Do you make out her name, Merry?" asked Harry of Frank, who had the glass.

"Yes. There, you can all see it now."

The schooner swung to port, and the white letters on her stern were distinctly seen.

"*P-i-r-a-t-e*," spelled Diamond.

"*Pirate*?" gasped Harry, doubtfully.

"*Pirate*!" exclaimed Hodge, excitedly.

"*Pirate*," came languidly from Browning, who showed no remarkable interest.

"That's right," nodded Frank. "An appropriate name for her, sure enough."

"I should say so!" nodded Rattleton. "She looks like a pirate."

"And I'm hanged if the man at the wheel don't look like one!" half laughed Frank, passing the glass to Harry.

Rattleton took a look through the glass.

"Both men are tough-looking fellows," he declared. "They have the appearance of men who would not hesitate to cut a throat for a sawbuck. I wouldn't—— What's up now?"

There was a commotion on board the black schooner.

CHAPTER XXV.

THE MAN WITH THE GUN

"Something's wrong!"

"Sure pop!"

The boys heard a scream. It sounded like ~~the~~ voice of a woman.

Then there was a hoarse shout. The man at the wheel woke to a show of interest, and the man forward started aft.

Suddenly a girlish figure appeared on deck. She ran to the rail and tried to leap overboard, but two men, besides those already on deck, appeared in pursuit, grasped and held her.

The girl seemed to see the small sailboat.

"Help!" she wildly cried. "Save——"

One of the men clapped a hand over her mouth, and she was carried away, struggling.

Then there was excitement on board the *Jolly Sport*.

"The Old Nick is to pay on board the *Pirate!*" exclaimed Rattleton.

"It's a girl, boys!" cried Diamond, all his natural gallantry awakened and aroused. "She is in distress. We must aid her!"

"Bring her round, Hodge—bring her round, and we'll——"

"Lay her up, Hodge, lay her up, and we'll make a run after the schooner!" came promptly from Frank. "I want to know something more about this."

"That's right," nodded Rattleton, who did not resent the manner in which Frank took command. "What right

have they to treat a girl like that! There's something wrong going on!"

Even Browning was aroused.

"I believe Rattleton is right," he said. "Maybe that girl has been kidnaped."

The *Jolly Sport* was headed in pursuit of the black schooner, without immediately attracting the attention of anyone on board the *Pirate*.

The girl had been overpowered with ease and carried below.

"What are we going to do when we overtake them?" asked Browning.

"We'll do something if we get on board!" exclaimed Hodge.

"But it's not likely we'll be able to get on board."

"Oh, I don't know!"

It was not long before the man at the wheel saw the boat in pursuit. He called to another man, who went below, after coming astern to take a look at the pursuing catboat.

In a short time two men came up from below and took a survey of the *Jolly Sport*. One of the men seemed to be captain of the schooner. He betrayed uneasiness.

Coming to the rail, the captain harshly shouted:

"What are you lubbers chasin' us fer? Go about, and mind your own business!"

"We wish to talk with you, captain," returned Frank.

"Don't want to talk," was the surly retort. "Keep off."

"We want to talk, I tell you. What's the use to be so unsociable. Make yourself agreeable."

"What do you want?"

"We saw you were having a little trouble on board and so——"

"Ain't havin' no trouble. Tell yer to mind your own business! If you nose round us, you'll get hurt."

"Who was the young lady who tried to jump overboard?"

"That was my gal," answered the man, after some hesitation.

"Why did she try to leap over the rail?"

"She's been sick, an' she's a little daffy in her upper deck, that's all."

"He's lying!" exclaimed Hodge, in a low voice. "You can tell that he is lying by the way he says it!"

"We've got a doctor here," fibbed Rattleton. "We'll come aboard and he'll prescribe for her."

"Keep off!" roared the man on the schooner. "We don't want no doctors botherin' round here."

"But we are coming aboard!" flung back Diamond. "We want to see that girl."

"You can't see her! If you come round here, you'll get yer heads broke!"

The black-bearded sailor was angry. He shook his fist at the boys, and used language that would not look well in print.

Still the *Jolly Sport* kept after the *Pirate*, as if the youthful crew of the former had determined to overhaul the schooner and board her.

There was a consultation on board the schooner, and then one of the men hastily went below.

The *Jolly Sport* was drawing close to the other vessel when the man reappeared, bringing a gun, which he handed to the black-bearded man who had done all the talking.

"Jee whiskers!" gurgled Rattleton. "That means ~~any~~ **ble!**"

"He won't dare use it!" declared Diamond.

The man with the gun leaned over the rail of the schooner.

"Now, look here, you fresh young lubbers," he roared, "if you don't go round and git, I'll fill you full of duck-shot, or my name's not Cyrus Horn!"

The way he said it seemed to indicate that he meant business.

"Hanged if I don't think he'll do it!" grunted Browning. "He is a genuine old pirate, for sure."

"Are you the captain of that schooner?" asked Frank Merriwell.

"I be," was the answer.

"Well, what's the use to be touchy, captain! We've got some beer on board, and you must be thirsty. You'll find us a jolly crowd."

"I don't drink beer and I don't want nothing to do with yer. Git!"

Capt. Horn leveled his big gun at the pursuing boat.

"Don't be hasty, captain, for——"

"Git!"

"Listen to reason."

"Git!"

The captain of the schooner was not to be beguiled by smooth words. They could see his greenish eyes glaring along the barrel of the gun he held, and he looked like a person who would not hesitate to shoot.

"I'll give ye till I count three to go about," he roared "If ye don't do it, I'll begin shootin'."

Then he counted:

"One!"

The boys looked at each other undecidedly.

"Two!"

"It's no use," said Frank, quietly. "If the man is in

such a mood, it's worse than folly to try to board his boat. He could claim that he took us for robbers, and——"

"Down with your helm!" cried Rattleton, and the *Jolly Sport* was put about.

None too soon, for the captain of the schooner was seen taking aim with great deliberation.

"Now git!" he roared. "If I see anything of yer again, I'll take a shot at yer jest for the fun of it."

"Well, if that man isn't a genuine pirate, it's not his fault," growled Browning. "It's certain he was cut out for one."

"He'd cut a throat with pleasure," nodded Hodge.

Merriwell was silent, with his eyes fastened on the receding schooner. There was a troubled expression on his handsome face, and it was plain enough that he regretted their inability to solve the mystery of the girl who had tried to leap overboard.

It was not like Frank to give up so easily, but he had realized that it was the height of folly to attempt to board the schooner in the face of the enraged man with the gun.

It might be true that the girl was crazy, but Frank could not help feeling that it was not true. Something seemed to whisper that she was a captive in the hands of wretched and unscrupulous men.

Such a thought was quite enough to arouse within Frank's heart a strong desire to rescue her, but it seemed that he was utterly helpless to render her any assistance.

Had our hero been sure the girl was a captive, he would have felt like following the *Pirate* at a distance and making an attempt to have the proper authorities render the girl assistance when Capt. Horn ran into some port.

If it was true she was crazy, the boys would make themselves objects of ridicule by interfering in her behalf.

The situation was discussed, and they finally decided to continue on their course to the Thimbles.

They steered for Pot Rock and the cove, where it was said Capt. Kidd had hidden his vessel, and near which, it was supposed, his treasure was buried.

It was past three in the afternoon when they ran into the little steamboat dock.

CHAPTER XXVI.

ON THE ISLAND.

Under a tree they lunched, drank their beer and smoked cigars and cigarettes. They were jolly, seeming to have forgotten the adventure with the mysterious black schooner.

Browning stretched his massive frame on the ground and puffed away in serene laziness.

"I'd like to stay right here the rest of my life and do nothing but eat and drink and sleep," he grunted.

"You'd miss the ball games this spring," said Diamond.

"Go to!" said the big fellow. "What are the ball games? A lot of fellows get up and bat a ball around, while another lot of fellows chase it. They run and whoop and throw the ball and get covered with perspiration. It is a most distressing spectacle. Ball games, indeed! Go to, I say—go to!"

"And the spring boat race—you'd miss that," said Harry.

"Another distressing spectacle. Nine men in a boat, eight of them working, working, working as if their lives depended on it. They strain every muscle, their faces are contorted with the agony of it, their eyes bulge with distress, their breasts heave as they try to breathe, and when the race is over some of them are like rags run through a wringer. Again I say, go to!"

"But you used to be enthusiastic over such things. You played football yourself."

"Which goes to show what a fool a fellow can make of himself. Of all things football is the worst. That is a real battle for life between twenty-two mad and furious

fools, every one of whom is thirsting for gore. They tear at one another, like famished wolves, buck one another, fling one another to the ground, jump on one another. Did I play football?"

"Surely you did."

"It's a far reach from such folly to the wisdom of to-day. Ten thousand dollars would not induce me to engage once again in a real game of football."

"But think of the excitement—the glory."

"The excitement is the delirium of fools. The glory—what is glory? How long does it last? Last fall, when Merry carried the ball over the line for a touchdown on Jarvis Field, with half the Harvard team on his back, he covered himself with glory. For a little time he was the talk of the college. His picture was in the papers. He was dined, and he would have been wined—that is, if he would have been. But now—now how is it? Spring has come, football is forgotten and his glory is fading. Everybody is talking of baseball and the way the nine will be made up."

"And you'll find they are talking of Merry just the same," declared Harry. "They haven't forgotten that he twirls the sphere."

"Oh, no, they haven't forgotten; but what if he were not available—what if he should refuse? How long would his glory last! Another would arise to fill his place, and he would be forgotten. Glory! It is the dream of fools. Give me plenty to wear, plenty to eat and lots of time to rest, and the world may have its glory."

Frank laughed.

"The same old Browning," he said. "And yet you are as much of a football and baseball enthusiast as any man at Yale. It breaks your heart when Harvard or Princeton wins from Old Eli. You go into mourning and

don't recover for a week. Oh, you put up a good bluff, old man, but I can read you like an open book."

Bruce grunted derisively.

"Very astute," he commented, and then relapsed into silence, as if it were a great effort to speak, and he had already exerted himself too much.

"And think of the pretty girls Merry wins by his popularity," said Jack. "He has opportunities to kiss lots of them."

"If a fellow has an opportunity to kiss a pretty girl he should improve it," declared Hodge.

"Ah!" cried Rattleton; "such an opportunity could not be improved."

To this all agreed, laughing, with the exception of Browning, who had closed his eyes and seemed to have fallen asleep instantly.

The boys talked of Yale's prospects on the diamond, and Harry said:

"It strikes me that we are going to be weak behind the bat this year. What do you think, Merry?"

"There are several fellows who will try for the position."

"Yes; but what do you know about them?"

"I don't like to say."

"Oh, come! You are with friends, and you may talk freely. What do you think of Ned Noon?"

"He is, in my estimation, one of the most promising men, but he can't run, and bats weakly. Behind the bat he might work very well, but he would be weak in other directions."

"That's string as a straight—I mean, straight as a string," cried Harry. "If Ned Noon stands a show to get on the 'varsity nine, there is hope for me."

"Well, there's Roger Stone," put in Diamond. "What about him?"

"He can bat like a fiend," said Frank, "but he is weak on his throwing. He'll stop anything he can reach, but it takes him so long to get a ball to second base that a good runner can steal down from first every time. That is a big fault. Stone will not do."

"Right again," nodded Rattleton. "And those two men are the strongest of the new candidates."

"Some man may show up who is not talked of at all now," said Jack.

Harry gave Hodge a quick glance.

"Old man," he cried, "why don't you make a try for the nine?"

An embarrassed flush showed in Bart's dark cheeks.

"That would be pretty fresh for a freshman, wouldn't it?" he asked.

"Not so confounded fresh. Merry got on the first year he was in Yale."

"That's different."

"How?"

"I am not Frank Merriwell, and there are not many fellows his equal."

Frank laughed merrily.

"Come off!" he cried. "The world is full of them. In order to get on at anything, a fellow must seize his opportunities. At the time that I got on to the nine there was a great cry for a change pitcher. I laid out to fill the bill, and I managed to fill it. That's all. Now there's a cry for a catcher, as well as for pitchers. It will be somebody's opportunity."

Hodge was silent, but there was an eager look on his face.

"I have pitched to you, Bart," Frank went on, "and I know what you are. We work well together. You are a dandy thrower, a good batter, and a bird on the bases.

Take my advice, get into gear and make a try for the nine."

"I don't know how to do it."

"There'll be plenty of fellows to coach you," said Diamond, quickly. "I am going in for a shot at third bag. I may get there, although several good men are looking in the same direction. If I fail, it won't kill me. I know I am not the only cake of ice. There are others just as cool. Make a bluff at it, Hodge. It won't hurt you to get left."

"Perhaps not," said Bart; but he felt in his heart that he would be cut keenly if he made a desperate try to get on the nine and some other fellow was chosen.

Browning sneezed and awoke.

"You're catching cold, old man," said Frank.

"No danger," said Rattleton. "He's too lazy to catch anything."

"That's got a long gray beard on it," grunted Bruce, with an air of disgust.

The wind, chill and raw, began to blow. Black clouds were piling up in the west, and the sun was shut out. This came so suddenly that the boys were startled.

"Jove!" cried Hodge. "There's a storm coming!"

"Remember what the old fellow on the tug said when we came out?" exclaimed Diamond. "He warned us."

"That's so!"

Frank was on his feet taking a survey of the sea and sky.

"If we want to get back to New Haven to-night we'd better get a hustle on," he declared.

Then there was a hasty gathering of such things as they wished to carry back and a hurrying down to the *Jolly Sport*. They clambered on board, stowed things away, cast off from the pier, ran up the sails, and made the first tack out to sea.

The sky became dark and overcast. Down near New York somewhere great rollers started and seemed to gather force and size as they surged along the sound.

The spray began to fly as the catboat plunged from roller to roller, and the boys saw a prospect of getting "good and wet."

Frank was at the helm, and his face wore a serious look. He realized that they were in for a bad run, to say the very least.

And the wind was dead ahead!

Harry showed nervousness. He owned the boat, but it was not that he was thinking about. He remembered the story of the Yale crowd lost on the sound some years before.

"Mink we'll thake it—I mean think we'll make it all right, Frank?" he asked, with evident agitation.

"We must," was all Merriwell answered.

The wind grew stiffer and stiffer. The *Jolly Sport* floundered considerably, and the spray flew thicker and thicker.

"We've got to take in a reef," cried Merry. "Get ready, all hands. Now—work lively!"

Lively work they made of it, but the catboat shipped a sea before the reefing was over and she was brought into the wind again.

The boys fell to bailing, and away went the *Jolly Sport* like a racer.

The wind continued to rise, and Frank found Harry's boat had her faults.

"She's no wind-jammer," he said. "Can't hold her close, and she will fall off, best I can do."

"If we'd paid some attention to the old fellow who warned us there would be a blow," regretted Harry.

"No use to cry over that," came sharply from Diamond. "We've got to make New Haven harbor."

Browning shivered.

"Don't know why I was fool enough to come," he grumbled. "Might be safe and warm in my room now."

It was five o'clock, but was so dark that it seemed much later. Rattleton, for all of his nervousness, cracked several jokes. Diamond made an effort to look unconcerned, and succeeded very well. Hodge was grim and silent.

The wind was fitful. Now and then Frank would cry: "Ease her off."

Then they would let out the sail quickly, and the cat's-paw would sweep over them.

"How is your old sheet, Rattles?" asked Diamond. "Will she hold?"

"Can't say," confessed Harry. "She isn't new."

"How are the halyards?"

"Strong enough so I have been up the mast with them."

"They ought to be all right."

Sizz—boom! A big wave struck the bow, the spray flew in a thick cloud, and they were drenched to the skin.

"Awfully jolly!" grinned Harry.

"Yes, more fun than a barrel of monkeys!" said Jack, sarcastically.

"That's nothing but the beginning," assured Frank, consolingly. "It'll be a regular picnic before New Haven is reached."

"How nice!" groaned Browning.

They took turns at bailing till all were weary and exhausted. Diamond's temper was beginning to rise, while Hodge was holding his down with an effort.

"Don't anybody ever again ask me to go sailing on an April day!" snapped the Virginian.

Darkness came down without the moon they desired.

"I wish we were back on the island," said Bart.

"Can't we run back there now?" asked Harry.

Frank looked away over the water and then shook his head.

"It's more than even we'd run straight out to the open sea," he said.

Frank took full command, and his sharp orders were obeyed unhesitatingly, showing they all had confidence in him.

The *Jolly Sport* lurched and staggered. She fell off amazingly. Frank gave orders that another reef be taken, and the boys sprang to obey, Browning making a show of haste.

Frank put two men on the sheet when the reef had been made, a laborious task, for their fingers were numb with the cold. The boat shook ominously.

But under the double reef she rode better.

All at once a cry broke from Bart's lips.

"Luff! luff!" he screamed. "Hard a-port, or we're goners!"

He pointed, and they all saw a dark mass that was bearing down upon them with the speed of an express train. It seemed to loom above them like the black shadow of doom. It sent a shudder of horror to their hearts.

"A vessel!" screamed Diamond.

"A vessel!" thundered Browning. "Look out, Merry!"

With all his strength Frank jammed down the tiller, and the boat came about on the other tack, although she seemed to do so with deathly slowness.

Every lad held his breath, expecting to hear a crash, feel the shock, or be hurled into the sea.

There was a slight jar, a scraping sound, and the black mass fled past.

"It's the black schooner!" shouted Diamond.

The same thought had come to Frank. There seemed to be something familiar in this overshadowing peril of the deep.

Past them flew the strange vessel. The wind was making a great racket, but high above its clamor the boys in the catboat heard a cry that must have come from human lips. It was wild and weird, and it sent a shudder through them.

On sped the mysterious vessel.

Round came the *Jolly Sport*, and, almost before anybody was aware of it, the catboat was running after the schooner.

Running before the wind the *Jolly Sport* was a wonder. She flew like a bird.

"What are you going to do, Merry?" shouted Rattleton, in amazement.

"I am going to try to get back to the Thimbles before it is pitch dark."

"It can't be done!" declared Diamond.

"It's our only show. The night is going to be blacker than a stack of black cats. We'll be run down here on the sound, or the seas will swamp us. We can't make New Haven against this wind. It is utterly impossible."

The others felt that Frank was right. The boat had shown that she was but little good against the wind, but she could run like a deer before it. They had been a long time beating off from the Thimbles, but it could not take them long to run back.

Then they thought of the vessel that had so nearly run them down.

"Did you hear that cry, Merry?" asked Rattleton.

"Yes, I heard it," nodded Frank.

"What do you think it was?"

"Hard to tell."

"Sounded like a cry of distress."

"Yes, that was what it sounded like."

Then all the boys thought of the girl they had seen on

the mysterious schooner. It occurred to each one of them that it was possible the cry had come from her lips.

For all that the *Jolly Sport* seemed to fly, the vessel was making still greater speed, and she was soon lost in the gloom.

The boys felt that the chance of making the Thimbles and running into the snug little harbor was small indeed, but they trusted everything to Frank Merriwell's judgment.

They had been bailing all along, thinking the water was coming in over the rail, but when they had turned about a startling discovery was made.

The water was coming in as fast as ever, although but little spray flew into the boat.

"She's leaking!" cried Hodge.

Frank had made that discovery some time before, and it was for that reason he had turned about so suddenly and unexpectedly. He hoped to strike the Thimbles, and, as a desperate resort, he could pile the *Jolly Sport* high and dry on the beach.

Frank knew the boat would not hold to continue the desperate attempt to beat across the sound. He was not sure she would hold to reach the islands.

But what if they missed the islands entirely?

They would be driven out to sea, and the chances were a thousand to one that not one of them would ever live to again place a foot on dry land!

CHAPTER XXVII.

IN THE HOUR OF PERIL.

It was a terrible risk running blindly for those islands, but it seemed a still more terrible one to attempt to beat across the black sound.

The five lads in the boat held their breath, strained their eyes, listened.

Around the boat the sea swirled and seethed. It rolled darkly on either hand, and the *Jolly Sport* cut through the water with a hissing sound.

Somehow through the darkness they could see great white bubbles of foam that came up out of the water and winked at them like the eyes of the mighty demons of the deep.

Those blinking eyes filled them with awe and horror. They shuddered and turned sick at heart. Their ears listened for the breaking of the surf on the beach of the islands, a sound which they longed, yet dreaded, to hear.

But all they could hear was the shriek of the wind, the swish of the sea, and the rushing sound of the boat.

"Bail!"

The word came like a pistol shot. It woke them to a realization of the peril that was creeping upon them.

Water was pouring into the boat from her leaks. It was rising around their feet, and the *Jolly Sport* was beginning to plunge and flounder distressingly.

"Bail!"

Again the word shot from Frank Merriwell's lips.

They hastened to obey. They scooped the water up

with the bailing dishes, with a sponge, and with their caps; but it came in faster than they could throw it out.

"We're going down!"

Rattleton uttered the cry.

"Well," said Browning, in the same old lazy manner, "it does look as if we might have to swim for it pretty soon."

Diamond and Hodge were silent. Their teeth were set, and they were straining their eyes through the darkness, as if they longed to see something that would give them hope.

A light flashed out, winked, disappeared.

"Lighthouse there!" shouted Rattleton.

"Running straight for it!" cried Diamond.

"Be on a ledge in a minute!" grunted Browning.

Frank shoved over the tiller, and the *Jolly Sport* went floUNDERing off through the seas, with her course changed somewhat.

"Bail, boys—bail!" Frank again commanded. "It is our only hope. If we can keep afloat five minutes longer——"

The wind tore the words from his lips, with a mocking shriek. He bent his head and gripped the tiller, while the boat wallowed along bravely, seeming like a wounded creature seeking cover as it grew weaker from loss of blood.

The boys worked with all the energy they could command to get the water out as fast as it came in. Bruce Browning did his best. They were chilled to the bone, dripping wet, and sick at heart. Every man of them felt that his chance of being drowned was most excellent.

Swish—bump! the big waves came down on the boat, struck her, piled over her. A score of times it seemed that she was swamped, a score of times she fought her way to

the surface, a score of times prayers of relief were whispered by white lips.

She was not making much headway. The wind was carrying her off helplessly.

Still Frank clung to the tiller, trying to steer and succeeding in a measure, so that he kept her from rolling helplessly broadside to the seas.

"Light again!" cried Diamond, as the flash of fire again gleamed out and disappeared.

Now came a sound that was like the sullen roar of an animal in distress. It was the booming of the surf on shore.

"If I don't strike the mouth of the cove, we'll be piled up on a ledge, or high and dry on shore in less than two minutes," came from Frank's lips.

They heard him, and they realized they were close upon the islands. The sound of the surf added a feeling of terror to their other sensations, and yet they were thankful they had not missed the Thimbles and been driven out to sea.

Louder and louder came the booming roar of the surf. Through the darkness they seemed to see a white wall of foam that shifted and heaved, leaped and roared.

All the tigers of the deep seemed to be at play along that white line. They saw the boat and its helpless crew. They roared their delight over the coming feast.

But ahead—what was that? A spot where the white line was not dancing and howling. The boat made for that spot.

"Hold fast!"

Frank was not sure it was the mouth of the cove. He could not tell in that dense darkness, but he headed straight toward that spot. They might strike at any moment.

Onward floundered the *Jolly Sport*, making a last gal-

lant effort to keep afloat. The roaring surf was on either side. The leaping tigers in white were there, gnashing their teeth and howling with impotent rage.

"It's the cove!" screamed Harry Rattleton. "We're all right! Hurrah!"

"Hurrah!" cheered Diamond.

Frank said nothing; he knew their peril was not over.

Bart Hodge said nothing; he would not have murmured had they gone down in mid-sound.

Bruce Browning was silent; he was exhausted by his efforts at bailing.

The great waves pursued the fugitive boat into the cove, like wolves in chase of a wounded deer.

All at once a black hulk loomed before them.

"A vessel!" cried Harry.

"Look out!" warned Jack.

With all his strength, Frank pulled over the tiller. The boat obeyed slowly and with reluctance. She could not clear the black hulk entirely.

"Confound them!" muttered Frank. "Why don't they have a light out? There's a law for this, and——"

Bump!—the *Jolly Sport* struck. Scrape!—she slid along the side of the vessel.

It was a marvel she did not go down then and there, but they continued to scrape and slide along the side of the vessel, which was heaving at anchor.

The shock was felt on board the vessel. As the boys looked up there was a faint gleam of light, and a man looked down at them from the rail. He snarled out something at them, but the shrieking wind drowned his words, and they did not understand what he said.

The boat cleared the vessel and went wallowing across the dark waters of the cove.

"Can't strike steamboat pier," muttered Frank. "Strike shore beyond. Bound to swim for it."

Then he called to the others:

"All ready, fellows! Got to swim. We're all right now, if we stand by each other."

They knew they would be in the water directly, but they were not scared now, for what was before them was nothing beside what they had escaped.

"Harry, are you ready?" called Frank.

"All ready, Merry," came back, promptly.

"Ready, Jack?"

"Sure," answered Diamond's voice.

"And you, Bruce?"

"I'm too fat to sink, don't worry about me," said Browning, with a laugh.

"How about you, Bart?"

No answer.

"Hodge, are you ready?" called Frank.

No answer.

"What's the matter with him? Why doesn't he speak?"

"Where is he?" asked Rattleton, excitedly.

"Isn't he here?"

"No! He is gone!"

"Impossible."

But it was true; Hodge was not in the boat. He had disappeared in a most remarkable manner, as if he had been dragged from the boat by the grim demons of the deep.

There was no time to think about this most astounding and terrible discovery. They had stopped bailing for a few seconds, but the water had continued to rush in, and now, without so much as one last faint struggle, the *Jolly Sport* floundered and sank.

"She's going!" screamed Harry.

"Jump!" cried Frank.

He saw them rise and plunge into the cold water, and then, with some trouble, he cleared the dripping sail that

sought to settle down over his head and drag him under with the *Jolly Sport*.

They were close to the shore, else they could not have escaped even then. They helped each other out, and dragged themselves upon the bank, where they sank down, panting and helpless.

Beyond the mouth of the cove the breakers roared, and now in their clamor there seemed a note of triumph, as if they knew not all of the crew on board the *Jolly Sport* had escaped.

And the four water-dripping lads who lay upon the shore were too numb for words. But their hearts were torn with grief, even though they had reached solid ground, for one of their number was not with them.

Where was he?

Had he been swept overboard by a wave and carried down without a sound?

It did not seem possible.

Frank was thinking of him. Where, when and how had it happened?

Frank remembered that Bart had been silent all along, but he was sure Hodge had been in the boat when the black schooner so nearly ran them down.

He was in the boat after that. The others remembered that he had helped them bail.

The mystery of his disappearance was appalling. It crushed down upon them all like some mighty weight.

He had helped them bail. Frank kept thinking that over. He understood Bart better than anyone else, and he knew Hodge had realized that the *Jolly Sport* was overloaded.

Then came a thought to Frank that brought an exclamation from his lips.

"Did he jump overboard purposely?"

That was the question that gave Frank a shock. He

realized that Hodge might have done so. Bart might have felt that his added weight was helping to sink the catboat and that the others would stand a better show of reaching shore if he were gone. Then——

Merry did not like to think of that. He did not like to fancy Hodge slipping overboard to lighten the boat so that the others might have a better chance to reach land.

Still he could not help thinking, and his fancy pictured Bart struggling with the surging waves, trying to keep afloat a few moments, rising on the crest of a wave and straining his eyes through the darkness for one last glimpse of the boat that contained his friends—his friends for whom he had sacrificed his life.

If Bart had done such a thing, Frank was certain he knew why. Merry had done everything in his power for Hodge, and Bart had felt his utter inability to make repayment. Now it was possible he had sacrificed his own life that Frank might possibly be saved.

Such thoughts brought to Merriwell the tenderest emotions.

“Dear, brave fellow!” he whispered.

Then he murmured a prayer, the words being torn from his lips by the furious gale.

Merry seemed to see Hodge feebly battling with the waves, his strength failing him swiftly. He fancied the waves tearing at him, beating upon him, hurling him down.

The last struggle had come and passed, and the cruel, triumphant, deadly sea rolled on.

In the morning they would search for him on yonder shore where the white tigers were dancing and howling. They would walk along the shore, hoping, yet dreading, to see his white face on the sand.

Frank thought of the time he had first met Hodge at Fardale Station. They had met as enemies, and Merry

had struck the proud and haughty lad who was shaking a barefooted urchin, after having kicked the urchin's dog from the station platform.

Hodge had vowed vengeance, and he had resorted to questionable methods for obtaining it; but in everything he had been beaten by Frank.

Then came the time that Bart had realized the cowardice of his own actions and Merriwell's nobility. Later they had become friends, roommates, chums. They had fought for each other, and Bart had said more than once that he would die for Frank Merriwell.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

A MYSTERY.

Huddled together on the shore, the boys began to talk it over. Rattleton did not remember seeing Bart after the second appearance of the black schooner, while Diamond was sure Hodge had been with them till they were near the mouth of the cove. All wondered why they had not seen him when he plunged overboard.

"Perhaps he felt that he had a better show to get ashore if he swam for it than he had if he remained in the boat," suggested Browning.

"Hodge was not a fool," said Frank, a bit sharply. "He knew he had no show at all if he left the boat."

"Then why did he leave it?"

"That the rest of us might have a better show. He thought the boat would keep afloat longer."

"Do you think that?"

"It seems that way."

They talked it over and over, wringing the water from their clothes. Despite the fact that four of them had escaped, all felt that a frightful calamity had occurred. At one time it had seemed there was not one chance in a hundred for any of them to escape, but, now they were ashore, the horror of the loss of a single man made them sick at heart.

"I'll never own another boat!" declared Rattleton. "I've had enough of it."

A light flashed out on the cove. It was on board the vessel that they had run against.

Then they spoke of her.

"Do you know," said Diamond, "I believe I can name that vessel."

"Do you really think so?" asked Harry.

"Sure."

"Name her."

"*Pirate*."

"What?"

Harry and Bruce uttered the exclamation together. Both were startled.

Frank Merriwell said nothing. Had he been asked to name the vessel, he would have said the same thing.

"How can that be?" asked Harry. "We thought it was the *Pirate* that came so near running us down on the sound."

"Perhaps it was."

"Impossible! She could not be here."

"Why not?" asked Frank. "We ran into this cove, and the *Sport* was disabled at that."

"But the *Pirate* is a big vessel."

"Not so very large."

"Why should she run in here?"

"There is some mystery about her. Like Diamond, I think that is the black schooner. She had time to run in here and drop anchor ahead of us, and that's what she did. We know no vessel was here when we left the cove this afternoon. She must have come in since then."

"Say, fellows," grunted Browning.

"Say it."

"I don't believe her name is a misnomer. It strikes me she is a genuine old pirate. If not, why is she running around in this way and taking such chances of being piled high and dry on these islands? She came into this cove to hide."

"The days of pirates are past," said Jack.

"Don't care," growled Bruce. "Capt. Horn is a pirate

chief, or he's the ghost of one, and his old schooner is a phantom, like the *Flying Dutchman*."

"She's a pretty solid phantom," said Frank. "We struck against her and scraped her side."

"If that is the *Pirate*."

"Hark!"

The boys listened, and the wind brought to their ears sounds that interested them.

"They are lowering a boat out there," said Frank. "Surely they are at some unlawful business, or they would not work in the dark and fail to display a single light."

A few moments later the boys heard the sound of oars clanking in rowlocks.

"Coming!"

Rattleton uttered the exclamation.

"Sounds like it!" agreed Diamond.

Browning grunted.

Merriwell was silent.

The wind was right for them to hear any sound that might come from the direction of the unknown vessel, but when it rose to a wild shriek nothing but its howling could be distinguished. When it fell, each of the four boys distinguished the sound of oars.

Somehow there seemed something mysterious about the movement of the boat. Each of the listening lads felt the mystery, although they could not have told why.

Harry's teeth chattered. He was cold, and he was nervous. The events of the night had quite unmanned him.

Clug-clank, clug-clank, clug-clank.

More than a single set of oars were being used. Frank felt sure of that, for his keen ear distinguished something in the sound that settled the point in his mind.

The boat was coming straight toward the point where the boys were crouching on the shore.

"Pier is near here," thought Frank. "They're going to run in there and get in the lee of it. But why are they coming ashore in this confounded storm?"

In the teeth of the wind a fine sleet was carried. It was too cold for a genuine storm of rain, and the sleet fell like some particles of ice.

No wonder Harry's teeth chattered together.

"Keep still, boys," warned Frank. "We'll get a look at those fellows."

"Huah!" grunted Browning. "Don't know how you are going to get a look at anybody in this darkness."

"They are bringing some kind of a light."

"Can't see it."

"They've got it just the same."

"What makes you think so?"

"Saw a gleam of it when they were getting into the boat."

"Yes; but it may have been left on the vessel."

"No; I'm sure I caught a flicker after the boat started."

"Well, what sort of a light is it if we can't see it now?"

"Dark lantern."

"Eh? Great Scott!"

All the boys, with the exception of Merry, gave a start. Why should the men in the boat carry a dark lantern?

Rattleton, Browning, Diamond, all three of them, flung the question at Frank.

"I don't know," confessed Merry; "but it is a part of the mystery."

It added to the keen interest with which the boys awaited the approach of the boat.

Burglars carried dark lanterns. Crooks carried dark

lanterns. What sort of men were these? What sort of a night expedition were they making?

For the moment the mystery surrounding the fate of Bart Hodge was forgotten. The boys had no thoughts for anyone or anything but the approaching boat.

The sound of rowing became more and more distinct.

"Changed now—not coming straight here," whispered Frank. "Going in at pier. I thought so."

Rattleton's imagination was at work; strange fancies flitted through his brain.

"What if they are kidnapers?" he thought. What if they had stolen that girl? What if they were paid to put her out of the way? What if they have murdered her and are bringing her ashore to bury her under cover of darkness, where her body will never be found. What if——"

That was the limit. He did not dare carry the speculation any further. Already he was gasping for breath, overcome with the horror of the thought. The adventures of the night bore heavily upon him. For the first time in his life he felt like a coward. He was willing to keep still and let the men in the boat go their way and do their will, no matter what crime they had perpetrated.

Frank did not feel that way. His curiosity was fully awakened, and he was eager to solve the mystery.

"Come!"

He arose to a crouching posture and moved toward the pier, stumbling blindly over the rough ground.

Diamond was ready to follow anywhere Merriwell might lead, and he followed close at Frank's heels.

Rattleton hesitated. It was not till Browning, with a groan, arose and started to follow the others that he seemed to awaken from the spell that had fallen upon him.

"Brace up!" he grated. "What ails you? Are you going to wilt now?"

He did brace up, but he followed along behind the others.

They did not go far before Merriwell brought them to a stand.

"They're landing," whispered Frank.

The rowing had stopped. They could hear a subdued murmur of hoarse voices.

The boat had come round under the lee of the pier, and the men were coming ashore.

As the boys stood there, they again caught a gleam of light—a moving ray, shot from a reflector. It was gone in a moment, but it had shown them several figures.

"Nearer!" palpitated Diamond, eagerly.

"Dangerous," declared Frank. "Might shoot the light on us at any moment. Can't tell what those men are doing."

The others felt that Merriwell was right. It might be very dangerous to be discovered.

"Shall we follow them?" asked Browning, who had been awakened in a most unusual manner.

"Perhaps. Wait and see."

The wind howled, the fine sleet beat upon them, the white tigers roared from the distant shore.

"Down!"

Merriwell hissed the word, sinking to the ground. The others followed his example.

"What's the matter?" asked Jack, throbbing with excitement.

"Coming," answered Frank, laconically.

This was true. The men had left the pier, and they were advancing toward the boys.

Again strange fancies flitted through Harry Rattle-

ton's head. Had they been discovered? Were those men coming to attack them? Were they destined to soon be engaged in a savage battle for life?

"If I ever get out of this scrape, I'll let the *Jolly Sport* rest where she is and keep off the sound in April," he mentally vowed.

"Lay low!" hissed Frank.

They flattened themselves upon the ground, hearing footsteps close at hand. They looked up and saw dark figures passing. One, two, three, four of them.

"Don't try any funny business with us, old man!" sounded a hoarse voice. "Take us straight to the spot!"

"If he tries ter fool Capt. Horn he's as good as dead!" said another hoarse voice.

Then there was a muttering of harsh laughter, and the four men passed on into the darkness.

Frank sat up, and the others did likewise.

"This is interesting!" Merry softly exclaimed.

"Yes, very!" grunted Browning. "Give something to know what it means. Can you tell?"

"No," confessed Frank. "All I could make out is that three of those fellows are making a fourth lead them somewhere."

"Let's follow," suggested Diamond. "Let's know what they are up to. What do you say, Merry?"

"Just what I'd like to do."

"What's the use——" began Rattleton. Then he checked himself, biting his tongue and thinking:

"Don't be a fool! If you're scared, don't give it away. They may never know it."

"Come ahead!"

Frank arose and took the lead. The others trailed out after him. He was following the sailors through the

darkness, and his companions were following him. Not one of them knew what the adventure might lead to; all of them realized that it might be very dangerous. They were sure the men ahead were desperate ruffians, but curiosity overcame every other emotion.

CHAPTER XXIX.

GHOSTLY SOUNDS.

Clank! clink! clank!

"What are they doing?"

"Digging!"

The boys had followed the men to a lonely part of the island, where the wind howled through the trees when it came down in fitful gusts, or moaned when it sank low.

The booming of the surf was like the steady roar of a distant battery in action. The night seemed full of alarms and terrors.

Frank had followed the unknown men with the skill of an Indian trailer. The others had followed him with less skill, but the sounds of the storm had favored them by drowning such noises as they made while stumbling along through the darkness.

At last the men had stopped, and, bit by bit, the boys had crept upon them.

There was a gleam of light to guide them. The lights came from two dark lanterns, the sides of which had been opened. The lanterns were held to aid the men who were at work.

Clink-clank! clink-clank! clink-clank!

One man was plying a pick. After a little he paused.

Scrape-swish! scrape-swish!

Another man was using a spade, flinging out the earth which the man with the pick had loosened.

"Digging!" repeated Diamond, in a palpitating whisper. "What does that mean?"

"Digging!" fluttered Rattleton. "Digging a grave!"

"Huah!" grunted Browning. "For whom?"

"Somebody! I knew it! Going to bury that girl! She's been kidnaped! They're going to put her out of the way!"

"How about the man they have with them—the man they forced to show them this spot?" asked Diamond. "What are they going to do with him?"

"Don't know. Kill him, too, perhaps! Let's git!"

"And leave him to be killed?" said Frank. "Well, I didn't think that of you, Harry!"

Harry felt the cut of the reproach. He choked as he tried to whisper something back. After a little, he asked:

"Well, what can we do? Tell me that."

"We can do our best for the man, if necessary; but I do not think it will be necessary."

"Then you think—just what?"

"That you are off your trolley."

"How? Which way?"

"I do not believe they are digging a grave."

"Then what are they doing? Why are they digging that hole?"

"They are looking for a souvenir."

"Eh? Are you jollying, Merry? A souvenir of what?"

"Capt. Kidd!"

The others had been listening eagerly. Frank's words caused all of them to gasp for breath.

"Then—then you think they are digging for——"

"Kidd's gold!" finished Merriwell.

There was a moment of silence, and then Browning hoarsely whispered:

"That's it—just it! It explains everything."

"Everything but the prisoner. One of those four men is not here of his own free will. That is certain."

"And the mystery of the girl on board the vessel," came from Harry. "It is certain she is not there of her own free will."

There was no doubt in the minds of the boys; all were satisfied that Frank had hit upon the truth.

Harry, however, was no less afraid, for he realized that, without doubt, the men who had taken such pains to come there under cover of the storm and had brought a captive with them were ruffians capable of any desperate deed.

The men worked steadily. One would use the pick a short time, and then the other would toss out the dirt with the spade. Not one of the four spoke. Deeper and deeper grew the hole.

The light fell on the faces of the men occasionally. They were rough and bearded. Frank watched them closely, and he soon decided that one was the man who had been at the wheel of the black schooner when they first saw the vessel that day.

Now there was no longer a doubt that the same black schooner lay in the cove, having run in there under cover of darkness, for all of the frightful risk.

The boys had heard one of the men speak to Capt. Horn as they crouched to let them pass, and that was quite enough to settle the point.

Who was Capt. Horn?

He was the commander of the black schooner *Pirate*, but what was his record and his business. He had looked like a man who would not hesitate to enter into anything by which it seemed likely he might make money, no matter how dishonest or dangerous the project might be.

Frank crept a bit nearer the four men, hugging the ground. The others followed him.

Merriwell remembered the stories he had heard of other attempts to recover Kidd's buried treasure—remembered how it had been necessary, according to superstition, for the treasure hunters to obey certain rules. They always

dug on a dark and stormy night, and not one of the party could speak from the time they began to work till the treasure was found. If they did speak the treasure would turn to old iron or vanish entirely.

For some time the boys watched the digging, wondering if there was a bare possibility that, at last, some one had located the spot where the pirate's treasure was buried.

The hole grew deeper and deeper. The two men got down into it, and were hidden to their hips.

Frank became tired. He resolved to test the courage of the diggers in some manner.

The wind sank to a low moaning, but, from far, far away it seemed to bring a sound that caused the men in the hole to start, stop digging and listen.

It was a voice singing, and it seemed to be away on the distant cove:

"Oh, my name was Capt. Kidd,
When I sailed, when I sailed;
And so wickedly I did,
When I sailed, when I sailed."

It was the famous song of the famous pirate, and it caused those men to tremble in their boots. They felt like dropping pick and spade and taking to their heels, but one of the men who stood above savagely motioned for them to go on with the work.

The wind rose to a shriek, full of mockery. The surf boomed in the distance.

Slowly the sailors picked up the pick and spade and resumed their work, but they were trembling now.

The sound of singing came nearer and nearer, as if Kidd himself were approaching the spot, singing at the top of his voice as he advanced.

The men grew more and more nervous as the sound

came nearer, but still the man above motioned for them to go on.

At last, when the singer seemed close to that very spot, the song ceased.

"Thunder!" muttered Browning. "Where is that fellow? Thought it must be another one of their gang coming."

"Nothing of the sort," whispered Diamond. "Didn't you see how scared the men digging were?"

"Sure."

"They would not have been frightened if it had been one of their own crowd."

"That's so. Who was it, then?"

"Capt. Kidd's spook," suggested Harry. "You know it is said his ghost haunts the place where he buried his treasure."

"Rot!" grunted the big fellow. "Don't take stock in spooks."

Then, of a sudden, when the wind had died once more to a low moaning, a wild burst of laughter was heard. That laugh was full of fiendish glee and mockery, and it seemed to come from some vague point in the very midst of the treasure-seekers.

Then the men in the pit did drop their implements and scramble out in hot haste. But they were met with a revolver in the hand of one of the men above, and it drove them back to their digging.

"Ha! ha! ha! Ho! ho! ho!"

Again the weird laughter sounded, and it seemed to the excited imagination of the diggers, to come from the pit they had made.

But that revolver was menacing them, and they dared not leap to the surface and take to their heels, although it was certain they wished to do so.

Again and again that laugh rang out. Then a deep, sepulchral voice was heard to say:

"Fools, do ye think to rob me now that I am dead? You shall find I guard my blood-stained gold! Not a single piece shall you touch!"

That was quite enough to frighten any sailor. Again the men in the pit dropped the pick and spade, but they seemed paralyzed with fear, and stood there, staring about with bulging eyes.

"Avaunt!" cried the hollow voice. "Flee from my wrath, or ye shall feel the touch of my dead hands—the touch of doom! That touch means death!"

A wild shriek broke from the lips of one of the diggers.

"I feel it!" he screamed. "He has touched me! I am a dead man! I am doomed!"

Then, shrieking with terror, he leaped out of the pit and fled.

That was enough to completely unman the others, and they lost no time in taking to their heels also.

CHAPTER XXX.

PURSUIT.

Frank had caused all this terror. As old readers know, he was a skillful ventriloquist, and he had seized the opportunity to work upon the superstitious fears of the ignorant sailors. With a skill that was absolutely wonderful he had made the singing seem to come nearer and nearer till it was close at hand, and then he had laughed so the sound appeared to issue from the pit the men had dug.

It was sport for Frank, and he hoped to frighten the men away so completely that they would abandon their captive. This, however, they did not do. Capt. Horn kept a clutch upon the captive, whom he dragged along as he hurried after the fleeing men, whom he savagely cursed as poltroons.

Capt. Horn did not know whence the ghostly voice had come, but, although he was startled, the sound of that voice had added to his belief that they really were on track of the pirate's treasure. He had more than half expected something of a weird and ghostly nature would happen, and he had tried to fortify the courage of his companions so they would keep at work for all of anything that might happen.

But those sailors, who had promised faithfully not to desert him, were frightened, and they fled as if the very Old Nick was in pursuit.

When Frank saw that Capt. Horn was dragging the captive away, he leaped up and ran to help the man; but the dark lantern was dropped, and both captor and captive disappeared in the shadows beneath the trees.

Frank ran in the direction he fancied they had taken. First he tripped over a stone and went sprawling upon the ground; but he jumped up instantly and dashed on again.

Bump—shash—grunt!

Frank was hurled down again, but this time he had struck the trunk of a tree, and he was stunned. It was some moments before he could recover, but still he did not give up the hope of rendering the captive some assistance.

When he got upon his feet he realized that the chances of overtaking Horn and his captive in the darkness was slim.

"Must do something," he muttered. "What?"

Then he thought of the boat.

"Cut 'em off! Perhaps I can do that. I'll try!"

He ran for the pier, hoping to get there ahead of Capt. Horn—hoping Capt. Horn and the captive would be the next to arrive after he reached the spot.

Frank's clothing was heavy with water, and thus he was hampered. He could not see what lay before him, and he took chances of a broken neck. Two or three times he went down, but he came up again like a bounding rubber ball.

"This— isn't— anything— to— bucking— Harvard's— line — in— football— game," he panted.

He enjoyed it. The thought came to him that he would have a jolly time telling the fellows of the adventure. For one moment he saw in his fancy a crowd of friends gathered in his room eagerly listening to the narration of that night's adventures.

He did not wait for his friends to overtake him. He had lost them in the darkness, and he knew it would not do to wait.

In a short time he approached the little steamboat pier,

still running like a racer, head up, and breathing through his nostrils.

"Wonder—if—I'm—ahead."

He could not tell. When he was close to the pier, he stopped and listened.

He heard nothing but the sweep of the wind and the boom of the surf.

"Can it be they got here ahead? Can it be they are gone?"

He crept out on the pier and looked over. Was that a boat under the edge of the pier?

He let himself over, hung down, felt out with his feet, found the boat and dropped into her.

"This is the one they came ashore in," he decided. "It's the only one here. I am ahead of them."

The boat had drifted under the pier when he dropped into her. He put his hands against the wet and slimy timbers and pushed her out. Then he started to climb up on the pier.

Hark! Voices close at hand! The men were coming!

He took hold of the edge of the timbers above and pulled himself up, but the moment his head rose above the edge of the pier he realized that the men were close at hand. They were coming, and he could not get off the pier before they reached it!

"Trapped!"

He felt out with his feet, dropped back into the boat, sat down.

Then it was that Frank Merriwell's brain worked swiftly. What was he to do? He thought of several things. His first thought was to cut the boat adrift, push it under the pier, where they could not find it, and keep still. Then he knew his friends would soon be coming down to that pier, and, if the sailors were there, a collision must take place.

His hand touched something in the prow of the boat.

"A tarpaulin!" he whispered.

With that discovery a daring scheme entered his mind. Not one boy in a hundred would have ventured to carry it out had he thought of it.

The boat was fairly large, and there was little danger that one of the four men would be placed in the bow.

"Got to hustle!" whispered Frank, as he heard the feet of the men on the pier above his head.

He lifted the tarpaulin, crawled under it, stowed himself as closely as possible in the forward end of the boat.

Not a moment too soon.

There was a tug at the rope, and the boat was dragged from beneath the pier. Then several cursing, growling, shivering men dropped into it.

Capt. Horn was there. He snarled at everybody, he swore at everybody, he was furious.

"A lot of lubberly cowards!" he raved. "A lot of fools! You were scared at nothing!"

"No, sir," said a sullen voice. "I heard it, cap'n."

"An' I felt it's touch, cap'n," chattered another, who seemed almost overcome with terror.

One of the men planted his heel fairly on Frank's fingers, but Merry set his teeth and made no attempt to pull his hand away, although he felt that his fingers would be crushed. It was a great relief when the man removed his foot.

Capt. Horn realized that his men were utterly overcome with fear, and so he allowed them to push off from the pier and row toward the black schooner, which was hidden in the darkness of the cove.

The waves beat against the boat with heavy thuds, but the arms of the sailors were strengthened by fear, and

they pulled lustily, seeming in terror that the ghost of the pirate chief should follow them even after they had left the island.

Capt. Horn continued to curse and snarl. His captive was silent.

That captive was a mystery to Frank. Surely it was not the girl they had seen on the vessel. It was a man, but not a word had Frank heard him speak.

The thought that he might be gagged came to Merriwell. Perhaps that was why he remained so silent.

The schooner was reached at last. There was a hail from the boat, answered from on deck, and then a line came down from above, was caught, and they were alongside.

Frank remained quiet for a little time after the men had left the boat. At last, he stirred, for he was in a most uncomfortable position, cramped and aching in every limb.

With great caution, Merry pulled the tarpaulin off him and got a breath of fresh air. It had ceased raining, and it did not seem as if the wind was blowing as hard as it had been.

"Short storm," Frank decided; "but it was long enough to raise the Old Nick with us and send Bart Hodge to the bottom. Poor Bart! I'll never see him more!"

The thought made Frank sick at heart, and, for some moments, he remained there motionless, benumbed by this fresh sense of the loss of his friend.

Merry knew Bart had regarded him as a hero. He had reached out his hand and steadied Hodge more than once when the dark-faced, passionate lad was tottering on the brink of a precipice. His hand had guided Bart's wavering footsteps into the path of honor, and for his sake Hodge had studied for months that he might be

in condition to pass the examination and enter Yale that spring.

And now he was gone!

No wonder Frank was sick and numb. After a time he aroused himself and sat up.

A short line held the boat close under the stern of the black schooner, upon which he could see no sign of life.

"I might cast off and slip ashore without a soul on this vessel being the wiser," he thought. "I could find the boys and bring them on board. What could we do then? There are, at least, four sailors. There are but four of us. It is a sure thing that the sailors are armed, and we are not. It's more than even chances that they'd do us up in a square fight."

It did not take him long to decide he would not be in a hurry about bringing the rest of the boys on board, but he resolved to go on board himself.

With the aid of the line, he pulled the boat close under the stern of the vessel, and, a moment later, he slipped like a cat over the rail of the *Pirate* and reached her deck.

Frank crouched low in the shadow of the wheel, listening and trying to peer through the darkness. He saw no moving thing. The wind was whistling through the rigging of the heaving schooner, and a loose rope was making a slatting sound, but that was all.

Frank moved. He did not stand upright, but, on his hands and knees, he crept along the deck toward the companionway. He had not gone far before the sound of voices reached his ears.

"They are all below," he decided.

The companionway was reached, and he started to slip down the stairs. He had not gone far before he halted suddenly and turned his head, having heard a sound behind him.

At that very moment, with a hoarse shout, a man sprang down the stairs and landed on Frank's shoulders.

With a crash and a bump, they went to the bottom together. Frank received a shock that robbed him of his senses for the moment, so that he was utterly helpless.

CHAPTER XXXI.

WHAT BECAME OF BART.

When Merriwell recovered a light was glaring straight into his eyes, causing him to blink. He saw four rough-looking men around him, and realized that he was in the cabin of the mysterious vessel.

One of the men was Capt. Horn, and, on closer view, he looked more the ruffian than he had seemed at a distance. His beard was black as ink, while his huge nose was turned up and his nostrils were wide open, like the mouths of two black funnels. He showed his teeth as he saw the captured boy look up.

"It seems to be raining boys to-night," he said, with a sneer. "Well, I can take care of 'em as fast as they come."

Frank looked at the others, and quickly decided that they were fit followers for such a captain.

"Excuse me," he said, with an effort. "Just dropped in. Thought I'd come aboard and see how much you'll ask to take me to New York. Must have slipped on the stairs—or something. Don't seem to know what happened. First thing I knew I fell, and then—here I am."

"Cute, ain't ye!" sneered Capt. Horn. "Think you'll make me swaller that, I suppose! Think I'm a durned fool! Made a mistake this time—biggest mistake of your life."

"You may be right," acknowledged Frank, promptly. "It's just like me. Seems to come natural for me to make mistakes. Made a mistake when I joined that picnic excursion. Made another when I let the boat go off without me. And now you say I made another when I came aboard

to see if you won't take me back to New York. I am getting it in the neck, sure."

"What's this you're trying to tell, anyway? Spit it out. How'd you happen to be on the island?"

"Came down on an excursion, got left, and here I am. I'll pay well if you'll take me to New York."

Capt. Horn pulled his beard and glared at Frank.

"What sort of an excursion?" he asked. "One of the regular kind from New York?"

"Of course," answered Frank, thoughtlessly.

"You're a liar!" said the man with the black beard, instantly. "Knew it all the time."

"Thank you," answered Frank. "You are polite."

"I saw you on the small boat to-day," said Capt. Horn. "You wanted to come on board then. How you ever succeeded in doing so now is more than I can tell, but you'll be sorry for it. When you go back to New York the tide will take you there."

"What are you going to do with me?"

"Feed you to ther fish, durn ye! It's no use to ask you questions, for you'll lie faster than I can ask 'em. Lies won't do ye no good."

"Sorry about that," was Frank's cool retort; "but it'll save me a heap of trouble to invent 'em. Shan't have to rack my brain to get 'em up."

Capt. Horn looked at the boy in astonishment. Frank was a cool customer for his years.

Merry was securely bound, as he had already discovered. The men lifted him and flung him into a berth, where he was left to his thoughts, which might have been more pleasant.

Frank's head had been injured in the fall, and it throbbed painfully, but he made no murmur.

The men talked a while, and then fell to playing cards.

Three of them played, while the fourth remained on deck to watch.

Frank could see nothing of the captives.

The night wore on. Capt. Horn arose and looked into Frank's face. The boy's eyes were closed, and he was breathing steadily and regularly.

"Never saw anything like that!" exclaimed the captain. "The youngster is asleep! He is a cool one!"

The watch on deck was changed, and the men took turns in guarding Frank.

Toward morning, after going on deck, Capt. Horn announced that the wind had changed, and they could get out of the cove.

Merry still seemed to be sleeping when all the sailors went on deck to get up the anchor and make sail.

Barely were they gone when Frank was startled by a voice that called:

"Hello, Merry!"

"Eh?" exclaimed Frank. "Who are you?"

A head rose up from the opposite berth. The light shone full on the face of the person in that berth, and Frank Merriwell came near shrieking:

"Bart Hodge!"

Frank was incredulous. He could not believe the evidence of his eyes. He was almost inclined to think himself staring at a phantom.

"Hodge—impossible!"

"Not a bit of it," assured the voice of Hodge himself. "I am here, but I'm tied, like yourself, and it strikes me we are in a mighty bad scrape."

"But—but we thought you dead," said Frank. "We felt sure you were dead. How do you come to be here?"

"That's an easy one. When the *Jolly Sport* slammed up against this vessel I thought she was a goner, and I made a scramble to get on board here, expecting the rest

of you to follow. I was astonished when you failed to do so, and I looked down to see nothing of the boat. She was gone, and I did not know but what she had gone to the bottom with the whole of you. They have kept me here ever since, for I was knocked over and tied up with ease, like the fool that I am! I've tried to get away, but it's no use. Then I heard you captured, and saw you dragged in here."

This was very astonishing, but Frank Merriwell's heart was filled with thankfulness to know that Hodge still lived. Hastily they talked over what had happened since the *Jolly Sport* was driven into the cove before the gale.

"Merry."

"Yes, Bart."

"Got a surprise for you."

"What is it?"

"Don't want to tell you now, but I know the captives—Capt. Horn's captives. We must do something for them. You are full of schemes, old man; can't you plan something now?"

"I can plan enough, but the trouble is to put the plans into execution. Where are the captives?"

"Beyond that door there."

Frank saw a door at the farther end of the cabin. He had not noticed it before.

At this moment one of the sailors came down from above. The sound of hoisting the anchor had stopped, and it was evident that the man popped down to take a look at the captives and make sure they were all right, for he stopped but a moment.

Soon the boys realized that the vessel was under way. They could tell by the motion.

Capt. Horn came down.

"Hello, cap," called Frank. "Whither away?"

"Out to sea," was the surly answer. "Going to drop you over where it is deep."

"Couldn't persuade you to change your mind about that? I don't want to be dropped overboard."

The man grunted. After a time another man came below. Capt. Horn rolled into a bunk and slept.

Frank strained and worked at his bonds. At first it seemed that he simply made them cut deeper and deeper into his wrists without loosening them in the least. After a time, he began to fancy he was making some progress.

If he could get his hands free he felt sure he would be able to liberate Hodge. Between them they could make a fight for life and liberty.

Hours passed. Capt. Horn got up and went on deck, accompanied by the man who had been in the cabin with him. Then the other two men came down and turned into the bunks. They seemed exhausted, and quickly fell asleep.

Morning dawned.

With the coming of dawn, Frank succeeded in getting one hand free. Then it was not long before he was entirely free, and he hastened to release Hodge.

Bart was palpitating with excitement.

"What'll we do, Merry?" he asked, in a whisper.

"First set the other captives at liberty," said Frank. "We must work lively."

"Steady, then," warned Hodge. "No matter whom you see, do not utter a cry. Here, tie this handkerchief over your face to your eyes."

"What for?"

"So the captives will not raise a cry when they see you."

Both boys tied handkerchiefs over their faces, and then Frank approached the door. This was bolted and hasped. There was no lock upon it. It did not take Frank long to

shoot back the bolt and release the hasp. Then he slowly opened the door, and looked into the small room beyond.

An old man was sitting helplessly in the corner, and a young girl, pale and wan, with tangled curls of yellow, lay on a bunk. The old man raised his head, and the girl looked up.

Frank recognized them both, and, despite the warning Hodge had given him, came near uttering a shout.

Before him were Capt. Justin Bellwood and his daughter, Elsie!

Elsie Bellwood was there—Elsie, his old-time friend, who was so dear to him! She was a captive in the power of those ruffians!

That thought was enough to make Frank furious and desperate. He suddenly felt that he was able, single-handed, to conquer all the ruffians on that vessel.

With his hand he motioned for Capt. Bellwood and Elsie to come forth. They realized that Frank was not one of the ruffians, and Elsie sprang up.

"Come out here," whispered Frank. "We want you to help us capture this vessel."

New life and hope sprang up in the heart of the old sea captain. He responded eagerly.

"Here," whispered Merry, pointing to the sleeping sailors, "watch those fellows, and do not hesitate to crack them over the head if they awaken. Take this stool, Capt. Bellwood, and give it to them if necessary. We are going on deck to tackle Capt. Horn and the other fellow."

The man nodded. He took the stool and stood ready. Then, to Frank's surprise, Elsie picked up a heavy boot as a weapon and stood over the other man.

"Come!" whispered Frank.

With Hodge at his heels, he crept swiftly up the companionway. A peep on deck showed him one man at the wheel, while Capt. Horn was near. The vessel was plun-

ging through a sea of rolling billows, the aftermath of the storm.

Capt. Horn's back was turned.

"Now is our time!" hissed Frank, as he tore the handkerchief from his face and cast it aside, fearing it might hamper him in some way.

Then he leaped on deck, with Bart close behind him, and they rushed at the two men.

The man at the wheel saw them, and uttered a cry. Capt. Horn whirled in a moment.

With loud shouts the boys rushed forward and Bart grappled with the sailor at the wheel.

Horn managed to avoid Frank's rush, and Merry saw him tugging at his hip pocket. That was enough to indicate that he was trying to draw a weapon.

Snatching up a belayingpin, Frank did not hesitate in attacking the ruffian with the black beard, who succeeded in pulling forth the weapon his hand had sought.

Before Capt. Horn could use the revolver, Frank leaped forward and struck the weapon from his hand. A second blow, delivered with all the strength and skill the young Yale athlete could command, stretched the ruffianly commander of the *Pirate* upon the deck.

A coil of rope was close at hand, and, with the aid of that, Merry quickly bound the fallen man. Then he hastened to the assistance of Bart, who was having a fierce battle with the other sailor.

The two boys succeeded in downing the ruffian after a time, and then they tied him, as they had tied the captain.

Frank secured Horn's revolver, and Bart obtained a knife from the other sailor. The wheel was set and lashed, and then both hastened below.

Capt. Bellwood and Elsie were still standing over the sleeping sailors, who had not been disturbed by the encounter that was taking place on the deck.

At sight of Frank, Elsie uttered a cry of amazement and joy, and nearly swooned. That cry aroused the men, but when they sat up one was astonished to find himself looking into the muzzle of a revolver, while the keen blade of a wicked-looking knife menaced the other.

They were so astonished that they were incapable of offering resistance, and were easily captured.

Capt. Bellwood's story was simple, but interesting. Being a follower of the sea, it was not strange that he should acquire information purporting to reveal the whereabouts of Kidd's buried gold. His secret was known to another sailor, and that sailor shipped with Capt. Horn. Then Justin Bellwood and his daughter were lured to New York, and induced to board the *Pirate*, where they became Horn's captives. Horn knew every inch of the sound, and he set about forcing Capt. Bellwood to reveal his knowledge of the supposed hiding place of Kidd's treasure. Capt. Horn also made love to Elsie, nearly driving her mad with fear, so that she attempted to jump overboard, an act that was witnessed by the boys on board the *Jolly Sport*.

Fortune had worked in a singular manner to bring about the undoing of Capt. Horn. When the ruffian and his crew were made secure, Capt. Bellwood took command of the *Pirate*, running her back into the cove where Diamond, Browning and Rattleton were stranded. The reappearance of the black schooner with Merriwell and Hodge on board nearly paralyzed the three lads with amazement. It took considerable explaining to make clear to them how such a thing had come about.

Capt. Bellwood carried the boys over to New Haven, where he turned Capt. Horn and his crew of ruffians over to the authorities. It may be as well to add here that it afterward developed that Horn was a most notorious sound smuggler. He was tried and convicted and sent to prison. His men all received short sentences.

Justin Bellwood was not able to recover Kidd's treasure, although he tried to find it. Filled with superstitions, he sometimes wondered if the treasure had not been spirited away in some uncanny manner on the night that Horn tried to dig it up.

As for the boys who sailed out of New Haven harbor that warm April day, they had a story to tell that was marvelous, and not even Frank Merriwell's reputation for veracity could make all who heard it believe it fully.

CHAPTER XXXII.

THE LONE FISHERMAN.

"Look!"

"Where?"

"On the corner. It's another one of them!"

"It's Browning!"

"Sure!"

"What is he doing?"

"Fishing, by the Lord Harry—fishing in the street! That is the most ludicrous spectacle yet. Ha! ha! ha!"

A burst of laughter came from the little band of students who had been making their way along one of New Haven's principal streets and come upon this astonishing spectacle:

Bruce Browning sat there on the corner, perched on a high stool, dressed like a fisherman, with a sailor's "sou'-wester" on his head, and rubber boots on his feet, gravely pretending to fish in the street with a pole and line.

Pedestrians paused to stare, poke each other in the ribs, laugh and chaff the big fellow on the stool, but he did not heed them in the least, calmly continuing to fish, as if he expected at any moment to feel a bite.

Frank, Hodge, Pierson, Gamp, Griswold and Noon were some of the students who had come upon this surprising spectacle while walking along the street.

Noon was a prominent candidate for the position of catcher on the 'varsity ball team, but Hodge was coming into notice through his work on the freshman nine, and, although he was a freshman, it was rumored that, aided by the influence of Frank, he stood a chance of getting on for a trial.

Joe Gamp was a big, awkward boy from New Hampshire, who, for all of the time he had spent in college, could not drop the vernacular of the farm. To hear him talk no one could have dreamed he was a college student, and that he stood well in his class. And he stammered outrageously.

"Gug-gug-gug-great gosh!" he cried, standing with his hands in his pockets and staring at the fat youth on the stool. "Will somebody tut-tut-tell me what in thunder it mum-mum-mum-means? First we saw a fuf-fuf-feller walkin' araound with his cuc-cuc-clothes turned wrong sus-sus-sus-side out, then another was bub-bub-bub-barkin' like a dorg, another was tryin' to stand on his head in fuf-fuf-front of the pup-pup-pup-post office, and here's Browning fuf-fuf-fuf-fuf—— Here is Bur-bub-bub-bub-bub—— I sus-sus-sus-sus——"

"Whistle, Joe!" laughed Frank. "Whistle, quick. You're going backward, and you'll have to say it all over if you don't whistle."

Gamp whistled.

"I sus-sus-sus"—whistle—"I say here's Browning tut-tut-trying to cuc-cuc-cuc-catch a fuf-fuf-fuf-fuf"—whistle—"a fish in the middle of the sus-sus-street, just as if he was fishin' in the dud-dud-dud-dud"—whistle—"the deep blue sea. I don't understand what all this bub-bub-business is abub-bub-bout."

"I didn't know but the first fellow we saw was doing it on a wager," said Bart; "but now——"

"Those fellows are candidates for some society," explained Pierson. "They have been commanded to do those things, and they dare not disobey if they wish to pass."

"Is that it?" cried Gamp, who was astonishingly green for a Yale man. "Well, dud-dud-darned if that ain't fuf-fuf-fuf-funny! A-haw! a-haw! a-haw!"

He had a laugh that was like the braying of a mule, and a passing pedestrian dodged so suddenly that he jumped from under his hat, while an old lady with an umbrella turned and cried:

"Shoo! Git away! Don't you bite me!"

She waved her umbrella in Gamp's direction and peered fearfully over her spectacles, as if she fully expected to see some fierce wild beast rushing upon her.

That caused all the other boys to laugh again, while Joe paused, with his huge mouth wide open, and stared in surprise at the excited and trembling old lady.

"Hey?" he cried.

"Mercy!" gasped the old lady. "I thought so. I thought it was a horse whickerin' for hay."

Then she hurried on, while the boys, with the exception of Gamp, were convulsed with merriment.

Joe stared after the old lady's retreating form, gasping for breath.

"First tut-tut-tut-time I ever was took for a hoss!" he exclaimed.

"That's a horse on you," chuckled Danny Griswold.

Despite himself, Bruce Browning had not been able to keep from turning his head a moment to see what all the excitement was about. As he did so, a street urchin slipped out quickly and hitched a dead cat onto the end of the line that lay in the street, losing not a moment in scampering out of sight.

Bruce pulled up the line to cast it out again, and the cat came with it.

Then there was another shout of merriment.

"Browning has met with a cat-astrophe," laughed Frank.

"He's caught a cat-fish," cried Danny Griswold.

"Spt! spt! Me-e-e-ow! Ma-ri-ar!"

Danny Griswold gave vent to a perfect volley of cat-

calls, and there was an uproar of mirth around that corner.

Through it all Browning retained his sober dignity, removing the cat from his hook, as if he had captured a fish, and flinging the line out into the street again.

A policeman, who was sauntering along at a distance, heard the sounds, and came rushing forward. He was a green man on the force, and he had not been many moons on this side of the "pond." He had red hair, and a face that looked like a painful accident.

"Pwhat's this, Oi dunno?" he exclaimed, bursting through the crowd and halting so suddenly that he nearly fell over himself when he saw Bruce. "An' now will yez be afther tellin' me pwhat ye're doin' there?"

Browning made no reply, but gravely pulled up his line, looked at the hook, as if to ascertain the condition of the bait, and again made a cast into the street.

The little Irishman grew red in the face.

"Look here, me foine b'y!" he cried, flourishing his stick; "it's the magisty av th' law Oi ripresint, an' Oi do be afther axin' ye a quistion. Pwhat are yez doin' there, Oi want to know?"

Bruce remained silent.

The spectators looked on with interest, wondering what the outcome would be.

The policeman came a bit nearer Bruce, and again shook his stick, crying:

"Is it a lunathick ye are? It's a foine spictacle ye do be afther makin' av yersilf. Av ye don't belave it, jist shtep over this way an' take a look at yersilf a-sittin' on thot stool loike a frog on a log. Get down now, ur Oi'll plaze ye under arrist!"

Browning did not heed.

"It's me duty Oi'll have to do," declared the officer, as he advanced on the big fellow; "an' av ye resist me, Oi'll

have to club th' loife out av yez. It's a lunathick ye are, an' Oi know it. Come along now, to th' station house."

But as he was on the point of pulling the big fellow from the stool, Browning gave him a look that made him stagger. His face worked convulsively, and he looked around for assistance.

"Pull him in, Paddy!" cried one of several town boys, who had gathered to see the fun, and who felt delighted to see a student placed under arrest.

"Thot Oi will!" cried the little cop, as he advanced on Bruce.

He caught the big fellow by the collar and yanked him off the stool in a moment.

"If it's a bit aff trouble ye're afther givin' me, Oi'll crack yer shkull wid me shillayly," he declared. "Come on, now."

Browning did not wish to be arrested, so he tried to argue with the officer, but it was useless to talk.

"It's a lunathick Oi know ye are," said the policeman; "an' it's not safe to let yez run at large."

"Take your hand off my collar!" said Bruce, sternly. "I have done nothing to cause you to arrest me."

"Now none av yer thrits to me, ye spalpane!" shouted the policeman. "Coom along!"

He gave Bruce a yank.

It was a comical spectacle to see the little red-headed cop yanking about the giant of the college, but it did not seem very funny to Browning.

"Say," he growled, thrusting his fist under the officer's nose, "if you do that again, I'm going to thump you once, for luck."

The policeman had a violent temper, and very little judgment.

"Attimpting to resist arrist, are yez!" he shouted, and

then, without another word, he rapped Bruce over the head, bringing the big fellow to his knees.

Browning had not looked for such a move, and he was so stunned that he could not rise at once, whereupon the policeman lifted his club again, as if to hit him once more.

The blow did not fall.

Frank's hand caught the club and held it back, Paul Pierson and Bart Hodge yanked Browning to his feet, Danny Griswold gave the big fellow a shove, and the voice of Ned Noon was heard shouting:

"Git!"

This turn of affairs was not at all satisfactory to the town boys, who had been delighted when the officer started to arrest one of the college lads.

At New Haven there is constantly more or less feeling between the town lads and the students. Sometimes this feeling is so strong that it is not safe for a well-known student to be caught alone in town at a late hour of the night. He is in danger of being stoned, pounded and forced to run for his life.

At the time of which we write the feeling between the college lads and the "townies" was rather bitter. Thus it came about that, as soon as Browning's friends tried to help him, one of the watching toughs cried:

"Come on, fellers! Dey're helpin' der bloke git erway. It's our duty ter stop dat."

The gang didn't care anything for duty, but they had been called upon to do a thing by their leader, and they did not hesitate about jumping in to the policeman's aid.

Thus it came about that, in a very few seconds, a small riot was taking place there on that corner, where, a short time before, all had seemed hilarity and good nature.

The little cop clung tenaciously to Browning.

"I call on yez to hilp me arrist this spalpane!" he squealed.

"We'll help yer!" declared the leader of the town lads.

"Yes you will!" flung back Bart Hodge, the hot color of anger rushing to his face. "Yes you will—not!"

Then he went at the leader of the gang, and, before that fellow was aware that he was attacked, Hodge cracked him a blow between the eyes that sent him sprawling.

The downfall of their leader seemed to infuriate the others.

"Thump 'em! Hammer 'em! Slug 'em!"

Uttering these cries, the roughs pitched into the college boys. Fists began to fly, and there was a hot time on that corner without delay.

The little cop rapped for assistance. While he was doing this, Browning gave him a twist and a fling that broke his hold and sent him flying into Bart Hodge's arms.

Hodge was thoroughly aroused.

"You're the cause of all this trouble, you little red-headed fool!" he grated.

Then, with a display of strength that was astonishing, Bart lifted the officer and hurled him violently against a stone hitching-post. With a gasp and a groan, the policeman dropped down limply and lay on the ground as if he had been shot.

Bart was astonished by the remarkable manner in which the little man had been knocked out. He paused and stared at the motionless figure, a feeling of dismay beginning to creep over him, for he realized that his ungovernable temper had once again led him to do an act that he would not have done in his sober moments.

"Great Scott!" shakily cried Ned Noon. "You've killed him, Hodge!"

Bart said nothing, but he felt a pressure about his heart—a sickening sensation.

It seemed that Noon was the only one of the party en-

gaged in the struggle who witnessed Bart's thoughtless act of anger. The others were far too busy among themselves.

But all realized the officer had rapped for aid, and they knew other policemen were sure to arrive on the spot very soon.

"Got to run for it, fellows!" panted Griswold, as he put in his best licks. "Got to get away, or we'll all be locked up."

Hodge plunged in to aid the others. He was a perfect tiger. Not even Frank seemed to fight with such fury and be so effective. Bart bowled the "townies" over as if they were tenpins.

It was not long before the fight was going in favor of the college men. Then another party of students happened along, and, at sight of them, the town lads promptly scattered and ran.

"Now's the time!" cried Merry. "We want to get out of this in a hurry, fellows."

Then he saw the officer lying stretched on the ground, and stared at him in surprise.

"What's the matter with him?" he asked.

"Nothing!" cried Hodge, feverishly. "He got a crack under the ear, and it knocked him out. He's all right. Come on."

The college boys lost no further time in getting away. They separated and made their way back to the college grounds with certain haste.

As if by general consent, they proceeded to Merriwell's room. They found Frank there, making himself comfortable while he studied, as if nothing serious had happened. He welcomed them all as they appeared.

Pierson was the first, and he was followed by Griswold, who strutted proudly as he entered, crying:

"Did you see me do 'em up, fellows? Did you see me

lay 'em out? Oh, I'm a hot biscuit right out of the bakery!"

"Quite a little racket, eh, Merriwell," smiled Pierson.

"Sure," nodded Frank. "We needed something to stir up our blood. We were getting stagnant here of late."

Joe Gamp came lumbering in.

"Dud-dud-dud-dog my cuc-cuc-cuc-cats!" he stuttered. "Ain't seen so much fun as that sence I was a fuf-fuf-freshman. But Browning did look comical up on that sus-sus-stool. A-haw! ha-aw! a-haw!"

Even as Gamp roared with laughter, Bruce came slouching into the room. He sat down and kicked off the rubber boots, which were too large for his feet, then he flung aside the "sou'wester," removed his oilskin jacket, and stretched himself wearily on the couch, observing:

"Fishing is thundering tiresome work."

"Were you doing it on a wager, old man?" asked Griswold.

"No," yawned Bruce; "I was doing it on a stool."

That was all they could get out of him. It was plain that he did not want to talk about it, and did not mean to talk.

"Anyway, we did up the townies all right," said Frank. "There was some sport in that."

"Too much work," grumbled Bruce. "Everything is too much work, and work was made for slaves."

Ned Noon came in and looked around.

"Where is Hodge?" he asked.

Bart was not there, but they fancied he would put in an appearance very soon, so, while they discussed the fight with the "townies," they kept looking for Hodge.

But Bart did not appear.

"Hope he wasn't pinched," said Frank. "He's so proud that arrest would seem a frightful disgrace to him."

There was a queer look on the face of Ned Noon.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

HODGE IN DANGER.

Frank was crossing the campus when a voice called to him:

"Hey, Merry, hold on; want to speak with you."

He looked around, and saw Danny Griswold hurrying toward him. There was a strangely serious look on the face of the little fellow, who was of a jovial nature and seldom inclined to take anything seriously.

The moment Frank saw Danny's face, he realized something was wrong.

"What is it, old man?" he asked, as Griswold came up, panting.

"They're looking for the fellow who did it."

"Did what?"

"Broke his ribs."

"Broke whose ribs?"

"The cop's."

"Why, the little fellow with the red head and liver tace."

"The one who tried to arrest Browning?"

"Same."

Frank whistled.

"And his ribs were broken?"

"That's it. He says it wasn't the big fellow who did it, but some other chap slammed him up against a stone post and smashed his ribs in. Officers have been here trying to locate the fellow. We're in danger of being pulled up as witnesses—or worse."

"Accused, you mean?"

"Any of us may be."

"Well, who did it, anyway?"

"Hodge."

Frank started.

"Hodge?" he cried. "Are you sure, old man?"

"No."

"Then why did you say that?"

"Noon says Hodge slammed the cop up against the post."

"Noon says so, eh? Did he see it?"

"Says he did."

"And he is talking about it openly?"

"Don't know about that. He talked to me about it."

"Anybody else present?"

"No."

"I must see Noon."

Merriwell was aroused, for he realized that Bart Hodge was in danger. Were Hodge arrested for injuring the policeman, and should the charge be proved against him, his college career might come to a sudden termination.

Frank had pulled his friend out of more than one bad hole, and he believed he understood Bart's nature pretty well. Hodge was again on the high road to an honorable career, guided by Merriwell's hand, but to thwart him at the very outset of his college life would mean almost certain ruin.

Merry's teeth came together with a click when he realized the danger that menaced Bart.

"I'm afraid you made a mistake in introducing that freshman to our gang," complained Griswold. "None of the fellows cared to know him, but they accepted him simply because of your friendship toward him. This is the result."

Frank was not pleased by Danny's words. They did not sound as if they came from the little fellow's mouth.

"None of my friends were forced to meet Bart Hodge," he said, quietly. "Hodge and I were schoolmates together,

and, when he came to Yale, I was not going to be cad enough to cut him because he is in a lower class than myself. I am not built that way."

"Oh, you might have treated him decent, without having him in your room so much."

"No, you are mistaken. At Fardale Academy we were roommates. What sort of a fellow would I have been had I shown, when he came to Yale, that he was not wanted in my room?"

Danny did not answer the question, but stood grinding his heel into the ground, looking downward.

"I trust you see plainly enough that I did what any white man should do, Gris?" said Frank, letting a hand fall on Danny's shoulder.

"Oh, I am not going to set myself up as a judge of your actions," was Griswold's impatient retort. "All I know is what it has brought us to. If I am pulled up and forced to tell what I know about the way the cop was hurt——"

"What will you tell? What do you know? You confessed to me that you did not see it."

Frank cut in rather sharply, giving Griswold a start. Danny looked rattled and flushed.

"Oh, I didn't see it, but Noon told me——"

"That sort of evidence will not go, old man, and you should know it. Take my advice, and keep still. This business must be hushed up, and it will be the fellow who talks too much that will get us into trouble."

"What if you are pulled up and questioned? Are you going to swear to a lie?"

It was Frank's turn to flush, but the flush was one of indignation.

"Did you ever know me to lie?" he asked, sharply.

"No, but this is different, and——"

"It will not be necessary for me to lie about this in order

to shield Hodge. I did not see anything. I did not see the cop injured. I can swear to that, and it's all they'll ever get out of me."

After a moment of silence, Griswold said:

"We may be able to protect Hodge by keeping silent, but I want to give you some advice, Merry. I am serious now. Don't grin at me. This is one time in my life when I am not thinking of anything funny, as the fellow said when the surgeons were getting him ready to cut off his leg. If you are wise, you'll let up on one thing you have been trying to do."

Frank could not help grinning when he thought of taking advice from Griswold, but he tried to look serious, and said:

"Go on."

"You have been pushing Hodge for the nine. Is that right?"

"Well," admitted Frank, "I have been using my influence to get him on, for I know he is a corker."

"Drop it!" cried Danny, pulling out a package of cigarettes and extracting one. "It won't go, and you are going to get the other candidates for the position of catcher down on you. Hodge is a very fresh freshman, and he does not stand a show of getting on the nine this year."

"I am not so sure of that," said Frank, quietly. "I got on in my freshman year, if you will remember."

"I know, but circumstances brought that about. Yale was in a hole for pitchers. You did some clever twirling on the freshman nine, and you were tried as a desperate expedient. That is the secret of your getting on the 'varsity nine your first year in college."

"Well, Hodge did some clever backstop work last Saturday, when the scrub played the regular nine. He played on the scrub, and he made a better record than either Noon or Stone, who took turns on the regulars."

"Oh, that was a chance, and it didn't show his mettle, for there was nothing at stake. He had better opportunities than the other fellows, that's all."

"Come off!" cried Frank, dropping into slang. "He did better throwing, and he would have caught every man who tried to steal second if the pitcher had not been a little slow in his delivery. As it was, he caught four men, while Noon and Stone caught only one each. He did not have a passed ball, for all that the pitcher was wild as a hawk, and he got three fine hits."

"Two of which were off you, Merry. That part of it didn't fool anybody. Ha! ha! ha!"

Frank flushed again.

"By that I presume that you mean to insinuate that I gave him easy ones, so he might hit it out. Look here, Gris, I have told you that I do not lie. Now I am going to tell you that I did my level best to fool Hodge, for he had told me that he would bat my eye out. I thought I knew his weak points. I gave him a high inshoot, and he got a pretty single off it; I gave him one round his ankles, and he lifted it out for three bags. The fellow who says I favored him in the least says something that is not true."

"Oh, well," said Danny, shortly, "I am not here to talk baseball. Anyway, I don't think Hodge stands a ghost of a show to catch on. Noon is the man who will get there."

"Nit!" muttered Frank, as Danny walked away, smoking.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

NED NOON MAKES AN OFFER.

What Danny had said to Frank set the latter to thinking. Up to that time he had not been aware that any of his friends were kicking because of his being chummy with Hodge.

Had Merriwell been a sophomore and Hodge a freshman the situation would have been altered materially, for sophomores and freshmen are natural enemies, and it is regarded as a crime for a soph to be chummy with a fresh.

On the other hand, there is more or less friendliness between juniors and freshmen. Juniors do everything they can to encourage freshmen in their struggle against the sophomores, even going so far as to marshal them for their rushes and give them points to be observed in their struggles with the sophomores.

It is true that there seldom seems to be any further bond of sympathy between freshmen and juniors than the dislike of both for sophomores. The discomfiture and downfall of the freshmen arouses nothing like pity on the part of the juniors; more often it causes the latter to openly express contempt.

At first, the apparent friendliness of the juniors leads the unsophisticated freshmen to think the third year men really like them, and have sympathy for them; but it does not take long for the freshies to discover their mistake—it does not take long for them to find out they are a thing quite apart from the juniors in every conceivable manner except their mutual dislike for sophomores.

Still, it sometimes happens that a junior and a freshman may become chums, while such friendliness between a

freshman and a sophomore would be regarded as a disgrace to the latter.

Frank had an independent way; he did not seem to care for traditions or precedent. He had shown that all along, but never so strongly as since becoming a junior. Almost his first act was to show friendliness toward a freshman bully, after conquering the latter in a fair struggle. This brought forth a howl from those who believed the only proper thing for him to do was to treat the bully with scorn and contempt after downing him.

But Frank kept calmly on his way, doing what he believed was right, regardless of anything that was said.

And now that Hodge was in college, he had chosen to accept Bart as a chum. If his former friends did not like it, he could not help it. He knew Bart Hodge's nature, and he knew Hodge would need to be steadied by the hand of a friend after entering college, else he would be certain to fall under evil influences and go wrong.

Frank had used his influence to get Bart on the 'varsity nine because he believed Hodge a better backstop than any of the candidates for the position.

Yale's catcher of the two preceding years had graduated and gone West, which left the position vacant.

Good pitchers are absolutely necessary on a good ball team, but the work of a good pitcher can be ruined by a poor catcher. The pitcher shines as the bright, particular star, but it is the work of the man behind the bat, almost as much as the pitcher's own skill, that makes him shine.

A good catcher steadies and encourages a pitcher at all times, and particularly at such moments as the game is hanging in the balance so that a safe hit or a fumble may win it or lose it. At such a time, if the pitcher has perfect confidence in his catcher, he stands a good show of doing his level best; but if he lacks confidence, he may think the

game is lost anyway, and fail to exert himself to his utmost.

Frank had first pitched to Bart on the old Fardale Academy nine, at which time the Fardale battery was a wonder and a terror to the ball teams of the surrounding country. Fardale had never lost a game with Merriwell and Hodge as the battery.

On the sporting trip across the continent, Frank found occasion to pitch to Bart again, and he discovered that Hodge had lost none of his cunning. Merriwell's "Yale Combine" played against the regular Fort Worth professionals, Fort Worth having the famous "Dad" Morse in the box, and beat them by the remarkable score of two to one.

In this game the throwing and batting of Hodge was a feature, and Frank Merriwell was delighted to find Hodge in old-time form. On the following day, Merriwell and Hodge had acted as battery for Fort Worth, the Texans easily defeating the Little Rocks, who were the leaders of the Southern League.

Frank had the Fort Worth papers containing records of the games, and he had placed them before the baseball committee and the captain of the 'varsity nine, calling attention to the fact that in the two games Hodge had not had a passed ball, had not made an error, had obtained seven assists, six hits and two scores. A record to be proud of, considering the fact that he was in company that was considered very fast.

But Hodge was a freshman, which counted against him in the eyes of the committee. The other candidates for the position were a sophomore, a junior and a senior. It was acknowledged that the senior had slight show of getting on. It was not his first attempt to get under the bat. He had played an outfield position one year, and had been substitute catcher one year, but this counted against him, if

anything, for he had never done anything particularly brilliant.

The other two men, however, Ned Noon, the junior, and Roger Stone, the sophomore, stood a fair chance of making the team. It was whispered about that Noon had some sort of "pull" with the committee, and he was almost sure to catch on, for all that it was thought Capt. Hardy favored Stone.

Hodge was called "Merriwell's candidate," and, for all of Frank's popularity, for all of the fact that he was looked on as the mainstay of the nine that season, it was agreed that Bart did not have much show of making the nine.

Frank, however, persisted in his attempt to get Bart on. Up to the time of his talk with Griswold he had not suspected the feeling that existed in relation to Hodge. Now he saw it all, and he realized that Bart was in double danger.

"He has injured a policeman, and, should it become known, some of his enemies might hold it over him. I must have a talk with him."

Frank started for Farnham Hall without delay.

Just outside the wide doorway, before putting his foot on the steps, he paused, brought to a sudden halt by the sound of voices within.

"Noon!" he thought.

Then he heard another voice.

"And Hodge!" he added.

The rivals were standing just within the doorway, talking earnestly. Frank could see the back of Bart's coat.

The first words that reached his ears caused Frank to stop thus suddenly.

"I tell you that you are in for it, Hodge. You knocked the cop out, and it will go hard with you if the job is fastened upon you."

"Well, I can't help it if it does," said Bart, and there was a sullen sound in his voice. "I didn't mean to hurt the little runt, but it was my confounded quick temper that caused me to fling him up against the post."

"You made a fool of yourself," declared Noon, with a sneering inflection.

"Well, I don't need to have you come and tell me of it!" cried Bart, angrily.

"If it is known that you did the job, you stand a good show of being dropped from Yale with a dull thud."

Not a sound from Hodge.

Merriwell was no eavesdropper, and he started to ascend the steps; but he dropped back and stood still, brought to a stop by Noon's next words.

"I am the only fellow of our crowd who saw you fling the cop up against the post. The others were too busy attending to the 'townies.' If I keep still, you stand a good chance of escaping; but, if I tell, you are a goner. That makes it plain enough that I can wind you up in a moment if I want to."

Frank would have given something to be able to see the expression on Bart's face when those words were spoken, but he could not do so. Breathlessly he awaited Hodge's retort.

"So that is your game, is it?" grated the voice of Merriwell's Fardale chum. "Well, I swear, I did not think it of you, and I haven't liked you, either!"

"You are shooting off too soon," hastily said Noon. "I didn't say I had any game at all, but I wanted you to understand just where you stood. You can do me a favor. Of course, I would not be mean enough to go back on a fellow who did me a favor. Instead of that, I would protect him, if necessary, by swearing one of the 'townies' knocked out the cop."

"I do not ask that much of my friends, much less of

you!" flashed Hodge. "If you want to blow on me, go ahead. All I can say is, that I'll punch the face off you if you do!"

"You wouldn't get the chance," declared Noon. "You'd be pulled for assaulting an officer in performance of his duty, and it would go hard with you."

Again Hodge was silent.

Once more Merriwell was on the point of ascending the steps, when Noon began again:

"There is no reason why we should be enemies, Hodge. We should be friends——"

"Not by a long distance!" exclaimed Bart, contempt in his voice. "I know you now too well for that, Ned Noon! We can't be friends."

"Oh, have it as you like; but you'll find it for your good not to make an enemy of me."

Hodge uttered a scornful exclamation.

"Oh, you needn't turn up your nose!" cried Noon; "for you'll have to pull it down again. I see I've got to talk straight to you. You make me tired! For a freshman you put on too many airs. What I want to say is this: If it wasn't for Merriwell's influence, you would not have a ghost of a show to get on the nine. As it is, you do not stand much chance, but——"

"But you are worried," sneered Bart. "That is remarkable."

"You do not stand much chance," Noon repeated; "but I shall stand a better show if you retire, for the only man against me who is at all dangerous will be Stone. It is easy enough for you to get out. You can tell Merriwell that you have decided not to play, anyhow. That will settle it, if you stick to it. If you do that, I'm ready to swear that I saw one of the 'townies' flop the little cop up against the post."

CHAPTER XXXV.

FRANK TALKS PLAINLY.

Merry listened breathlessly to hear what Hodge would say to that.

There was a few seconds of silence, during which Frank fancied he could hear Bart breathing heavily. Then Hodge spoke, and the scorn and contempt in his voice was withering.

"You have proved yourself to be just the cheap cur that I thought you were at first!" he said. "Nobody but a dirty dog would try to get the best of a rival in such a manner!"

Frank felt like crying out, "Good for you!" but clasped a hand over his mouth and held back the words, while he laughed softly with intense satisfaction.

Noon uttered a curse.

"Do you dare to talk to me like that, you miserable freshman!" he grated. "Why, I'll—I'll——"

"What will you do?" asked the voice of Hodge, trembling with eagerness. "I wish you would do something! I'd like to have you lift your hand to me, Noon! I'd take delight in soaking you just once, and I do not feel like it as long as you keep your hands down. Oh, do put 'em up! I don't know but I'll let you hit me once, if you will!"

Frank laughed out loud, but the excited lads within the doorway did not notice it.

"That's Hodge—the same old Hodge!" thought Merry. "The blood in his body is boiling now. He would eat Noon."

"Oh, so you're a fighter!" sneered Noon. "Well, I am not going to fight with you. I would not disgrace myself

by fighting with such a fellow as you are. But I want your answer."

"You shall have it. Here it is!"

A second later, Noon came tumbling down the steps, assisted by Bart Hodge's boot, which struck with violence beneath Ned's coattail, fairly lifting the fellow off his feet.

"That's my answer!" called Hodge, from the doorway. "Now, go ahead and do your worst, you dirty sneak!"

Noon picked himself up, cursing bitterly. One of his hands was cut and bleeding, and the left knee of his pants was torn.

"That settles your hash!" he snarled, shaking his fist at Bart, and failing to observe Merriwell in his rage. "I'll cook you for that!"

He turned away, and, with a biting laugh, Hodge disappeared, ascending the stairs.

Frank started after Noon, quickly overtaking him.

"I want to speak with you," he said, quietly.

Noon started and turned pale. He was tying a handkerchief about his injured hand.

"What do you want?" he huskily asked.

"Hold on a minute, and I will tell you."

"I don't want to stop here," said Ned, looking around. "I have fallen and torn my trousers, besides hurting my hand here. If you wish to talk to me, you know where to find my room."

"I am not going up to your room," said Frank, quietly; "and I am going to talk to you now. What I have to say will not detain you long."

"All right, go ahead," snapped Ned, scowling.

"I happened to see you when you took your tumble," said Frank, still speaking smoothly and serenely. "I know all about it, for I overheard by accident some of the conversation between you and Hodge."

Noon's face turned paler than it had been, and he bit his lip. Then, with a sudden effort at bravado, he snapped:

"Well, what of it?"

"I heard your threat to blow on Hodge."

"What of that?"

"You will not blow."

"By the eternal blazes, I will!" cried Noon, his eyes glaring. "I will get even with that fellow!"

"You will do nothing of the sort."

"Who will prevent me?"

"I will!"

The eyes of the two met squarely. For some moments Ned tried to look straight at Frank, but, after a little, his eyes drooped, but he sneered:

"You? I know you are the chum of that sneaking freshman, but I fail to see how you can keep me from blowing on him."

"I'll tell you how," came quietly from Frank. "If you blow on him, I am going to blow on you."

"What do you mean by that?"

"I mean that I will tell what I know—what I overheard. I will tell how you tried to frighten Hodge into giving up the attempt to make the nine. How you threatened to blow on him about the affair with the cop if he didn't withdraw, and how he booted you out of Farnham Hall, as you deserved. How do you like that?"

"It won't save Hodge," muttered Noon, sullenly.

"Perhaps not; but it will cook you. How much show do you think you will stand when it is known that you resorted to such an expedient to get a rival out of the way? You will be branded as a sneak, and your friends will avoid you."

Noon was whiter than ever.

"I don't know," he said; "perhaps my word is as good as yours."

"Perhaps so. If you think so, go right ahead and see where you land. I'll go you ten even that you strike on the back of your neck. I know you will not make the nine. You will defeat yourself by your own meanness."

Frank was talking plain. He believed it was necessary to talk thus to a fellow like Ned Noon. He felt that Noon could not be shamed into abandoning his plot against Hodge, but he might be brought to do so through fear.

Ned ground his teeth, for he began to realize that Merriwell was right in saying he could do so much. Frank had influence, and he would be believed.

"I am giving it to you straight, Noon," said Merry. "Have a little reason. Do you want to knock yourself out just to down a rival? You say Hodge does not stand much of a show getting on the nine. Then, if this is the case, you are liable to beat him in a fair and square manner. It strikes me that such a thing would be far better revenge than beating him in a sneaking manner. It would be far better to beat him in an honest struggle than it would to have him withdraw and thus give you a better chance of getting on the nine. Isn't that plain? If you won over him fairly, you would have a chance to crow."

Frank was talking in his smoothest manner, and he was making his words count.

"Perhaps you are right," admitted Noon, after a time. "I had not thought of it in that light. But, if I agree to let Hodge alone, you must promise not to tell what you overheard. Will you promise?"

"Sure."

"Then it's a bargain."

Soon after they separated.

Frank sought the officer who had been hurt, and found him in the hospital. The little Irishman did not recognize Frank as one of the students.

"Mr. O'Farrel," said Frank, "I wish to speak with you concerning a matter of importance."

O'Farrel gave Merry a close scrutiny.

"Pwhat's thot ye want to spake about?" he asked, suspiciously. "It's yersilf Oi dunno at all, at all."

"My name is Merriwell," said Frank, "and I am a student."

A look of anger came into the face of the injured cop.

"An' is thot pwhat ye are?" he cried, glaring at Merry. "May th' ould b'y floy away wi' all studints, yersilf included! Divvil a bit av good are they at all, at all. Look at me, mon! Oi'm here fer doin' av me duty an' attimptin' to arrist wan av thim spalpanes, bad cess to him!"

"That is what I wished to see you about, sir," said Merry, in a manner that seemed to indicate that he had something he wished to say to O'Farrel in confidence.

"Well, now, me b'y, Oi dunno pwhat ye want ter see me about thot fer. There's some av thim hillions thot Oi'll make sorry they iver bothered wid Patsy O'Farrel in th' discharge av his duty. Here Oi am in bid, wid me body bruised, an' it's a miracle that none av me bones are broken."

Frank started slightly.

"It was fortunate that none of your bones were broken," he said.

"But me back is spraint so it pains me th' whole toime," said O'Farrel, hastily.

"I believe it was thought at first that some of your ribs were broken?"

"Yis, Oi thought so mesilf, but th' docthers say Oi'm not thot bad hurrut."

Frank drew a breath of relief, feeling thankful, indeed, for this knowledge.

The little cop began to scowl again, and pucker up his homely face.

"So it's a studint ye are?" he exclaimed. "Well, Oi dunno thot Oi want to talk wid ye at all, at all."

"But I know something you may desire to know, Mr. O'Farrel."

"Oi'm not sure av thot."

"I understand you are anxious to learn just who it was that threw you against the post and injured you?"

"Pwhat av thot?"

"Perhaps I can tell you."

An eager look came into the face of the man on the cot.

"Av ye can do thot——" he began; then he stopped short, showing suspicion. "Pwhy should ye be afther doin' such a thing?" he asked. "Is it not a studint ye said ye wur?"

"Yes; but I might tell you what you want to know, just the same."

"Divil a bit ye will! Thim studints shtick by ache ither too well fer anything loike thot. It's foolin' me ye're troying to do."

"You are hasty in your conclusions, sir," said Frank, calmly. "I know that, as a rule, students stand by each other; but there are exceptions to every rule. Now it is possible that, for some very good reason, I may wish to divulge to you the name of the fellow who laid you up. It is possible that he is an enemy of mine, and I am taking this means to hurt him."

"Is thot it?" said O'Farrel, slowly, again keenly scrutinizing Frank's face. "Oi'll confiss Oi didn't take ye fer thot sort av a chap at all, at all."

"You can't always tell what a man will do by the looks of his face," laughed Frank, flushing.

"An' ye want to blow on another studint?"

"Well, I saw a part of your encounter with the students, and I know who it was that did you up. If you are

going to make it hot for him, it is possible that I will tell what I know."

"Oh, Oi'll make it hot fer th' spalpane! An Oi'll make it hot fer th' rist av th' gang! They intherfered wid an officer in th' discharge av his duty, an' a sorry piece av business it will be fer thim!"

"How long will you be laid up, do you know?"

"A week, th' docthers say."

"Perhaps two weeks?"

"Oi can't afford thot. Oi have me family to support."

"How much is your salary a month?"

O'Farrel told Frank.

"And you may lose half a month's wages. That is tough."

"Sure an' it is!"

"Now, Mr. O'Farrel," said Merry, in his most suave manner, "there is such a thing as a misfortune that is a blessing in disguise. You have no accident policy, and you need money. How would you feel if you were to receive during the time that you are idle a sum every week double your regular salary, besides having all your bills paid?"

CHAPTER XXXVI.

FRANK AND THE POLICEMAN.

O'Farrel gasped.

"Here! here! here!" he cried; "don't be afther tryin' any av yer funny thricks on me! Oi won't shtand fer it!"

"There is nothing funny about this; it is sober, serious business. Although you have not been long on the force, Mr. O'Farrel, you have distinguished yourself by your courtly bearing, your utter fearlessness and your politeness to the ladies. You have been a bright and shining star on the New Haven force, shedding brilliant effulgence around you, so that, although in your modesty you were not aware of it, you were regarded with admiration and esteem by a large number of citizens. Whenever you were on night duty, the belated citizen who passed over your beat felt that he was safe, for he knew you were a terror to footpads. In the daytime the ladies went blocks out of their way in order to have you escort them across the street. The moment it was known that you had been injured, there was general sorrow and indignation. Then it was that your friends showed themselves, and they have raised a fund to be paid you as long as you shall be incapacitated for work."

O'Farrel nearly lost his breath.

"In—inca—— Pwhat's thot mane?" he gurgled.

"It means as long as you are unable to perform your duties."

"Is thot it? Oi didn't know but it wur th' name av some new disease. You don't be afther tellin' me thot th' citizens av New Haven are goin' to pay me fer bein' hurted?"

"Exactly that."

"Oi'll belave it whin Oi receive th' money."

"Here is your first week's payment," said Frank, producing a roll of bright new bills and dangling them before the officer's eyes.

"Let me fale 'em," said O'Farrel, reaching out.

"Wait a bit," said Frank, putting the money behind his back. "There is a condition. You can do a certain person a favor."

"Oi thought there wur something behind all thot. Pwhat shall Oi do?"

"Keep your mouth shut."

"Kape me mouth shut? How?"

"About the manner in which you were hurt. Tumble? Catch on?"

O'Farrel looked doubtful.

"Oi dunno," he confessed. "Will ye be afther makin' it a bit plainer?"

"That's easy. Certain persons in New Haven—friends to you—are interested in the chaps who were concerned in this unfortunate affair. They are also interested in you. They do not wish you to bring harm to the students, and they do not wish you to be at any loss on account of that unfortunate encounter."

The injured man looked still more bewildered.

"It's big worruds ye are afther usin' now," he said, hazily. "Oi'm worse mixed thin Oi wur before."

"I am trying to make it plain that it is for your interest not to push this matter. Doctor says you are not much hurt. It was a boy who hurt you. You are an officer, and you do not want it known that a boy without a whisker on his face did you up. Some folks might think you were no good. The ladies who have walked blocks out of their way to have you assist them across the street would turn their backs on you. The citizens who have felt perfectly

safe while passing along your beat at night would feel safe no longer. Burglars and footpads who have trembled at the mention of your name would sneer at you. You would fall into deep disgrace. It is more than likely that you would be fired from the force as inefficient."

O'Farrel blinked and gasped again.

"Begobs! Oi niver thought av thot," he muttered.

"You can see it plainly enough now. You must state that the fellow who slammed you against the post was a giant—six feet four. Say he caught you from behind. Say another fellow hit you with a baseball bat. Say you are satisfied you were mistaken in thinking them students. Say they must have been hoodlums of the town."

"An' pwhat do Oi get fer thot?"

"This!"

Again Frank flourished the money before Patsy O'Farrel's greedy eyes.

"You get this now," declared Frank. "You get as much more next week. You get another lot the next week, if the doctor says you are not fit to go back to duty."

"Begorra! it's a timptation."

"No temptation; an act of friendship on the part of your friends. And your friends are working for your good."

"Pwhat av they bring th' spalpane that did it before me?"

"You must fail to recognize him. That is easy. You might say you never saw him before. You might call attention to the fact that you are an officer who could handle such a boy with one hand. You might become indignant to think that anybody fancied such a boy could do you up."

"It's a good schame; but Oi'm not sure this ain't a thrap."

Frank saw that he must allay O'Farrel's suspicions, and

he talked his prettiest. When he made the effort, Frank could be extremely suave and persuasive. Never in his life was he more persuasive than just at that time. Occasionally he would flourish the bright, new bills before O'Farrel's eyes.

At last the officer succumbed. He took the money, and then Frank snapped out a little book, saying:

"Sign here, Mr. O'Farrel."

"Soign! Soign pwhat?"

"Your name."

"Th' divvil Oi will! Ye don't catch me thot way! Whoy should Oi sign me name, Oi dunno?"

"Receipt. That's all. Reads like this: 'Received of Frank Merriwell the sum of twenty-five dollars, in consideration of which I agree to his proposal.' That's simple."

"It looks loike a thrap."

"No trap."

"Phwat av ye wur to show thot recate against me?"

"You could swear that the proposal was any old thing. If I swore it was something else, your word is as good as mine. As you are an officer, it should be a little better. This is a mere formality—a matter of business. I always take a receipt when I pay out money."

"It's an Oirishman ye ought to be, me b'y," declared O'Farrel, admiringly. "It's a slick tongue ye have in th' head av yez."

Then he signed the receipt, and Frank left the hospital, feeling well satisfied with the result of his visit.

"I believe Hodge is safe now," he thought.

He was right. Somebody "blowed" on Hodge, and Bart was taken before O'Farrel. The injured policeman looked him over, and then positively stated that Hodge was not the one who slammed him against the post. He added that he did not remember Bart at all.

Hodge was released.

Ned Noon swore when he learned of this.

"Beastly luck!" he grated. "Thought I had fixed it so Hodge would get snapped. That cop must be a fool!"

Others were taken before O'Farrel, Browning among them, but he failed to say that he recognized one of them.

The town lads who had been engaged in the affair kept still, fearing they would get into trouble if they came forward and told what they knew.

All were astonished when O'Farrel failed to recognize Hodge, for it was not known that Bart had been saved by the hand of a friend.

It was a great relief for Hodge, who had feared the outcome of his passionate act.

As often as possible the regular nine and the "scrub" got out for practice.

Hodge had not been given a trial on the regulars, for all of his good work on the scrub team.

"We'll fix that, old man," said Frank Merriwell. "Haggerty and Walbert are going to be tried in the box next time, while I am to pitch against the regulars. Haggerty, you know, is the little chap who came here from Williams. He pitched against Yale year before last, and held Old Eli down to seven singles. Without doubt he is a good man. Walbert is an Andover man, who may show up well, although he is rather new."

"How are you going to fix the regulars?" asked Bart, eagerly.

"I am going to pick the scrub to suit myself."

"How will you make up the team?"

"You and I will make the battery, and I shall put Browning on first."

"What?" shouted Bart, astonished. "You can't mean that?"

"Why not?"

"Why, he is too lazy to draw his breath, to say nothing of playing ball."

"That's all right. He will play for me."

"And he will be worse than a wooden man on first bag."

"Not on your life! I know Browning. He is all right."

"Can't see how you can say that, Frank. His laziness is something awful. He won't be able to stir out of his tracks to stop a hit or a wild throw."

"Don't believe yourself, my boy. You seem to have forgotten that he covered first for us when we played against Fort Worth."

"No, I have not forgotten. But he was in different condition then. He had worked himself down during the trip across the continent. There was some life in him then, but now——"

"You shall see there is some life in him now. I can wake him up, if anybody can, and I'll do it. He will do anything for me."

"Perhaps he might if he thought it of any importance, but he will not think so about a game against the regulars. He'll say it's simply to give the regulars practice, and he won't stir up."

"You'll see what he will do after I talk to him. He will surprise you, and you won't be the only one."

"All right; have your own way. I know you will, no matter what I say. Who are the others?"

"Diamond on second."

"He's all right."

"Rattleton on third."

"He's fair, but Flobert is a better man."

"I'd rather have Rattleton, for he is another fellow who will break his neck, if necessary, for me. I can get out of him all there is in him, and Flobert sulks sometimes."

"All right. Suit yourself. Who will play short?"

"Haven't decided on that position yet. There are two or three to choose from."

"Take Fales."

"What Fales?"

"Freshman. Good player. I recommend him."

"Well, we'll take Fales if you say so."

"Now, how have you fixed the outfield. Who is in right?"

"Tom Thornton."

"Good man?"

"Pretty good. I've taken him for his batting. If he could play as well all round as he can bat, he'd be on the regulars."

"Middle?"

"Jones."

"What, the fellow you call Dismal?"

"Same."

"Why, he's too sad and slow to play ball!"

"Wait till you have seen him. He can wake up, and he'll throw almost as well as Ephraim Gallup. If he gets a good chance, he'll surprise somebody."

"Who's the left fielder?"

"Joe Gamp."

Hodge gasped.

"That beats all!" he cried. "Why, that fellow is a regular blunder-heels. He can't play marbles!"

"Wait and see. He'll be another surprise, or I'm mistaken. He is a slugger with a stick, and no mistake. Tried to fool him one day, and he seemed able to rap out anything I gave him. He dug 'em out of the dirt with his bat, took 'em two feet off from the base, and reached up into the air and drove 'em out. The pitcher who tries to fool him will drop dead before the game is over."

"Well," said Bart, slowly, "you have seemed to be a pretty good judge of ball players, old man, but I think you

are away off this time. You have named the most confounded aggregation ever seen around here."

"The other side will be confounded," smiled Frank. "Wait and see, old man. All I ask of you is to do your prettiest."

"You may be sure I will."

CHAPTER XXXVII.

OUT OF PRACTICE.

A large crowd turned out to witness the six-inning game between the 'varsity nine and Frank Merriwell's "scrub" team. Yale was anxious about her ball team, for it was not showing up as well as it should, while Harvard and Princeton were said to be in prime condition.

Despite his popularity, Frank had enemies in college, and those enemies were circulating the report that his arm was "broken," that he had a "dead wing," and that his day as a pitcher was past. They declared Yale was leaning on a broken reed when it depended on Merriwell to win games.

There were stories about the new pitchers to be brought out by Harvard and Princeton. They were feared not a little.

All acknowledged that Yale was in serious need of a first-class backstop. Stone or Noon might develop all right, but the uncertainty about them was wearing. Hodge, Merriwell's candidate for the position, was sneered at.

When it was known that Merriwell would get up a "scrub" team and play the regulars, Frank's enemies hastened to say that the time had come when it would be seen how easy he could be batted. They knew that, as a rule, no pitcher who feels secure of his position on the regulars will take the chance of doing himself injury by pitching his level best for a "scrub" team. Generally, he considers it practice enough for the regulars if he pitches fairly well and lets it go at that. Frank's enemies thought that was what he would do. They knew little of his plan to make the regulars hustle to win the game.

There was much speculation as to the exact make-up of the "scrub."

"They say Diamond and Rattleton will play," said Bink Stubbs, speaking to Sydney Gooch. "They are two of Merriwell's particular cronies, you know, but neither one of them can play fast ball."

"What do you care?" laughed Gooch.

"Oh, it'll be nuts for me. I hope the boys will hammer Merriwell all over the lot."

When the "scrub" appeared there were exclamations of astonishment.

"Whiskers!" cried one. "Is this to be a comedy game? There's Bruce Browning. He'll go to sleep running bases."

"Doing what?" cried another. "You don't suppose he'll run, do you? He wouldn't run for a doctor if a rattlesnake bit him!"

"Look!" shouted a third. "There's Dismal Jones! Mommer! But this will be a peach of a game!"

"And there's Joe Gamp!" gasped a fourth. "When did he ever play ball? Oh, my! my! my!"

"They've got him to coach!" laughed the first speaker.

Phil Hardy, captain of the regulars, looked Merriwell's nine over quizzically.

"Look here, old man," he grinned, drawing Frank aside, "what sort of a job is this?"

"What?" asked Merry, blankly.

"We are out here for practice, and we want to play against a team that will give us some."

"Don't let that worry you. You are going to get all the practice you want, captain."

"But not with that turnout?"

"Yes."

"Rats!"

"You'll see."

"What's the use to fool! Why don't you take the regular 'scrub'?"

"Because I have a better nine."

Phil saw, with no little surprise, that Frank seemed to mean it.

"All right," he said; "but we are not going to play six innings if this gets to be too much of a farce."

"You may stop any time you like after the third inning," smiled Frank.

"I know you are going to pitch against us," said Phil; "but I don't suppose you fancy you can play the whole game?"

"Not at all. You will find there are others."

"Why don't you take somebody in the place of Browning? He will drop dead getting after a ball."

"Don't worry about Browning. He's all right."

"I know he was a good man once, but he has had his day."

Frank smiled confidently.

There was a little preliminary practice, as if it was to be a regular match game. Frank got off his sweater and warmed up in earnest, just the same as he would have done had he been preparing to pitch against Harvard.

The "scrub" took the field first. As they went out scores of students shouted at them sportively, and they were the butt of ridicule.

"Where did you find 'em, Merriwell?" shouted a voice.

"They are a lot of flubs!"

Frank laughed easily.

"Wait a little," he advised, "and these flubs will give you apoplexy."

He looked his men over to see that they were in proper positions, and then, as Cal Jeffers, Yale's heavy-hitting center fielder, came up to the plate, he motioned for Gamp to move a little farther back.

This caused some laughter, and a voice cried :

"What do you want to put him back for, Merriwell? He couldn't catch anything, anyway."

"Oh, he might—by accident," returned Frank, who seemed ready to talk to anybody. "I have known more surprising things than that to happen."

Stubbs nudged Sydney Gooch.

"He knows he's going to be hammered," said Stubbs. "See him get the fielders back."

"I hope they will hit every one he throws!" said Gooch, maliciously, as he fingered his throat, thinking how Merriwell's fingers had felt there once on a time.

Browning had slouched down to first as if going to his own funeral. There was a sad and hopeless look on his face, that made him look even more dismal than Jones.

Frank turned to look at him, and then burst out laughing heartily.

"Come, come, Bruce!" he cried. "It isn't quite as bad as that. Wake up, now, for I am going to get into gear and shoot 'em over."

Browning said nothing, but his face did not grow a whit less dejected.

Jeffers poised his bat, and Merriwell faced him. Then the first ball was sent spinning toward the backstop.

Jeffers knew it was a fine thing to hit the first ball pitched, if possible, as it made a good showing for the batter. He went at this one.

He hit it!

Crack!

Away the ball sailed, away over the head of the short-stop, away toward left field.

"I knew he would do it!" cried Bink Stubbs, in delight. "It is a homer! Oh, that will nearly break Merriwell's heart!"

Down toward first Jeffers scooted.

It was seen immediately that, for all that Merriwell had sent Gamp back, the ball was going far beyond the position held by the left fielder.

Gamp turned and ran for it, but the effort seemed a waste of energy. The spectators laughed to see the long legs of the country boy working furiously as he raced out after the ball.

"If he gets those feet going much faster, he won't be able to stop for a week," shouted somebody.

"What's he think he's going to do?" laughingly questioned another.

"He's playing chase with himself!" shouted Sydney Gooch.

Jeffers reached first, and tore down toward second. Surely it was a home run. What a blow for Merriwell.

The ball was dropping now. Gamp was near it, but he could not touch it. He was looking up, trying to locate it. He looked over his shoulder and saw the ball.

Then he made a last spurt that astonished everybody. Still the ball was passing far over his head.

Safe?

Not quite!

Gamp was tall, and he was running swiftly. With a mighty leap, he went into the air after the ball, still going in the same direction. He reached far up with both hands and——

More than a hundred spectators caught their breath. Some rubbed their eyes in amazement. Some muttered exclamations of astonishment.

The ball had struck in Joe Gamp's hands!

"He's got it!"

"He's caught it!"

"Hooray! hooray!"

A few cheered, but the most of those who witnessed the phenomenal catch were dumb with amazement.

For Gamp held the ball, having robbed Jeffers of one of the prettiest hits ever seen on that ground.

Frank Merriwell laughed.

"Well, that's pretty good for a lumber-heels," he said, with satisfaction; "but I expected something of the kind from him."

Cal Jeffers was disgusted when the coacher at third stopped him. He could not believe he was out.

"What's the matter with you?" he angrily cried. "It's a home run!"

"Ought to have been," said the coach; "but that long-legged farmer caught it. See, he's just throwing it in."

"He must have picked it up," said Jeffers.

"He did," nodded the coach; "picked it up in the air. Finest catch I ever saw."

"What—he made the finest catch you ever saw? Come off! This is a jolly!"

But Jeffers found it was no jolly, for the umpire declared he was out, and he walked in to the bench, railing at the luck.

Bink Stubbs was gasping for breath. It was some time before he could say a word, and then he faintly cried:

"Take me home to mommer! It always makes me sick to witness a frightful accident like that."

"Of course it was an accident," said Capt. Hardy, who was not playing, although on hand in a suit.

"Of course nothing of the sort," laughed Frank Merriwell. "Might just as well say it was an accident that Jeffers hit the ball, and I do not claim that."

"We know that wasn't an accident," cried Sydney Gooch, getting behind a knot of students as he shouted the words.

"That's right," nodded Bink Stubbs, laughing as if it was a joke; "that wasn't an accident. Merry is easy. They'll hammer him out of the box."

He said this openly, but Frank knew him well enough to understand that it was intended for a sneer. Bink Stubbs seldom joked.

Frank paid not the least attention to the cries of his enemies, but caught the ball, which was flung in to him, and took his position in the box.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

IN THE GAME.

The regulars had been so dazed by Gamp's marvelous catch that not a man had moved toward the plate, so the umpire was forced to call:

"Batter up!"

Hal Faunce was the next man on the list. He left the bench and picked out a bat.

"I'm going to do the same trick Jeffers did, just to see if that farmer out there in left garden can repeat his trick," declared Faunce. "Look out for me, Merriwell."

"That's right," cried a voice from the crowd of spectators; "line her out, Fauncie. Jeffers showed how easy Merriwell is to-day. Anybody can hit him."

Frank continued to smile, but, mentally, he exclaimed:

"Think so, my fine fellow, if you like! I'll have to see what I can do. I know Hal Faunce's weakness, and I'm going to lay for him."

He sent in a "coaxer" to start with, but Faunce did not try to repeat Jeffers' trick by lining out the first one pitched, and the umpire called a ball.

The next one was high, and the umpire called another ball.

"Merry doesn't dare to let him hit it," shouted somebody.

Frank smiled, motioning for Hodge to come under the bat.

Bart walked down and put on a mask. He had not smiled during all the excitement. His face was unmoved, and he made a strong contrast to Frank Merriwell, who looked as pleasant as if he were witnessing a free show.

Taking his place close under the bat, Bart signaled for an out drop.

Merry shook his head, immediately assuming a position which Hodge understood to mean that he would deliver a high inshoot.

In order to make the others believe he was doing all the signaling, Bart made a fake signal, which did not mean anything at all.

With his greatest speed Frank sent a ball whistling through the air. To Faunce it looked like a high straight one, and he could "feast on that kind."

He struck with all his strength, but the only resistance met by his bat was that of the air, and it was such a surprise that Faunce was thrown off his feet.

Plunk!—the ball was held in Bart Hodge's glove.

"One strike," called the umpire.

"Here! here! here!" laughed Frank. "Don't be trying to throw yourself at the ball, Faunce. That won't do. Hit it with the bat."

Faunce picked himself up, looking red and disgusted.

"Oh, I'll hit it next time!" he savagely declared. "I'll knock the peeling off it!"

"That's right," nodded Frank. "Knock the stitches out of it—if you can. I don't believe you can."

Some one in the crowd groaned derisively.

"Hello!" said Merry, with perfect good nature. "Your friends are groaning for you now, Hal. They know you have no show to get a hit. Take my advice and wait for two more balls. Perhaps I can't get 'em over, and you will get a life on four."

"Oh, you go to—Chicago!" flung back Faunce, nettled. "I'm going to hit her next time, and you want to get off the earth if it comes your way."

"All right, let her go."

Bart was ready, and Merry sent another ball flying over

the plate. It was another high inshoot, and Faunce swung again, missing it as cleanly as before, and nearly throwing himself down a second time.

"Two strikes," called the umpire.

Frank laughed heartily, but Hodge was as mirthless and stern as before.

"What is he doing with you, Faunce?" cried Danny Griswold, from the seats. "He seems to be making a monkey of you."

"I'd make a monkey of you if I had you by the neck, you little runt!" muttered the batter, under his breath.

Frank saw that Faunce was so angry that he trembled, and he felt that it would be easy to strike the fellow out.

He was right, for he sent in a third high inshoot, and the batter went after it just as hotly as he had gone after the others, missed it, and was out.

"Sorry for you, old man," said Frank, quietly. "Don't believe I can work that on you again."

"I know you can't!" snapped Faunce, as he walked to the bench.

"Costigan, come up and take your medicine," laughed the scorer.

Joe Costigan, the left fielder, who had played third the season before, advanced to the plate. He was a stocky fellow, a reliable man, and a good hitter. It was said that he had no weak points at the bat.

Merry gave him a high swift one, and Costigan let it pass for a ball. Then Frank made the same motion, but sent in a slop drop. Costigan tried to get under it, struck too quick, and missed it.

"One and one," called Capt. Hardy. "Merry is easy fruit for you, Joe."

"I am not so sure of that," muttered Costigan. "I have seen him fool too many good men to think him easy."

Frank feared Costigan more than he had Faunce, al-

though the latter was the more brilliant hitter. Costigan was not puffed up with too much confidence and he was as steady as a mill.

"I'd give something to strike him out," thought Merriwell.

He tried to "tease" the batter, but Costigan would not bite, and two more balls were called.

"Now you have him in a hole, old man," cried Phil Hardy. "He's forced to put it over."

Frank thought swiftly just then. Which had he better do, put it over or try a "fooler?" That was a question of some moment just then. He knew well enough that Costigan was the kind of fellow who would take four, instead of breaking his back for a hit, and laugh as he trotted down to first.

But there was something else to be considered. Costigan had seen considerable of Merriwell's pitching, and he knew Frank was at his best when forced to send them over. Merry had great control, and no one was better aware of it than Joe Costigan. Frank decided that Costigan would think that the next one was sure to be straight over and swift.

"He will try to line it out if it looks good," decided Frank.

Then he made a delivery that seemed to put all the speed possible into the ball, which started as if to go straight over the plate.

Frank had made no mistake in his reasoning. Costigan bit, but, as it was an outcurve, he did not touch the ball.

"Two strikes!"

Bart tossed the ball back to Frank.

Costigan looked disgusted, and Capt. Hardy cried:

"It would have been a ball if you had waited."

No one knew that better than Costigan himself.

Without delay Frank sent in another. This time it was

an outcurve, but it was started straight at the batter. Costigan was a trifle mixed and he started back. Too late he saw what kind of a ball it was, and weakly swung his bat at it.

He missed.

"Three strikes—man is out," called the umpire.

Hodge flung down his mask and sent the ball rolling down toward the pitcher's box, while Merriwell and his "scrub" team came in from the field.

"Who said they would bat me out of the box?" laughed Merry.

"Wait," grinned Bink Stubbs, trying to appear pleasant and jovial. "The game has just begun."

"That was crafty work, Merriwell," complimented Capt. Hardy. "I will give you the credit of that."

"Thank you," said Frank, pleasantly. "Jeffers gave me a shock, and that made me brace up."

"That farmer out there on the left lawn gave all of us a shock," said Hardy. "How did he catch that ball?"

"With his hands," smiled Frank.

"I didn't think he caught it with his feet, but there was a time that it seemed as if he had just as good show to catch it with his feet as with his hands. How did you know he could play ball?"

"Oh, I've talked with him considerable, and I discovered that he knew all the fine points of the game. Then he told me that he used to play on a strong country team up in New Hampshire—sort of a league team."

"Huah!" grunted Hardy. "That would bar him from playing with Yale, even if he should prove fast enough. Without doubt he has taken pay for playing."

"I don't know about that."

"It would make him a professional, if he had. Say, how about that Fort Worth business? I understand you and

Hodge played with the team down there. Were you paid for it?"

"Not a cent."

Hardy looked relieved.

"I was afraid you had taken pay," he said. "If you had been that foolish, we would be in a scrape, for you might be barred as an amateur, you know."

"And that would give some of my very particular friends great satisfaction," smiled Frank. "But you need not let that worry you at all. We played with Fort Worth for the sport of it, and did not receive a cent for doing so."

By this time the regulars were in the field. Ned Noon was behind the home plate, with little Haggerty, the Williams man, in the box.

Jones was the first batter up for Merriwell's side. He looked sad and heartless as he advanced to the plate.

Haggerty flung his cap on the ground by his side. He stood with his little legs spread, chewing gum rapidly and grinning. He was a pleasant little fellow.

Ned Noon came up under the bat at the very start. It was plain he was going to show what he could do.

Haggerty sent in a pretty one, and Jones stared in surprise when the umpire called a strike.

"Too bad!" he sadly muttered, with a shake of his head. "Didn't know it was going over."

Some of the spectators laughed at him.

"Look at the ball, Dismal," cried one, "and you will make it weep."

Haggerty grinned and poised himself again. He made a round arm flourish, and sent in an outcurve.

Jones struck, but he could not reach the ball by a foot.

"Two strikes!"

The spectators began to laugh.

"Wait," smiled Frank. "He may hit it all right."

But Dismal was a trifle rattled, and he missed the third one, striking out.

"Oh, say, Merry!" exclaimed Capt. Hardy, who was sitting on the bench at Frank's side; "this is going to be too much of a farce."

"Oh, I don't know!" was Frank's careless retort. "You can't tell about that yet. You fellows may hold us fairly good play, so that there will be some interest in the game. Don't get discouraged as soon as this."

"Come off! You know what I mean. That gang of yours hasn't a show against us."

"Really! And you did not score the first time at bat! Your crust surprises me, old man."

"We didn't score because that jay from New Hampshire caught a ball by accident, and you struck out the next two men. You can't keep that up."

"I don't know about that, either."

"Say, you make me tired!" came warmly from the captain's lips, for he was aroused. "If you keep on, I'll go in and take a hand myself."

"Do it! It will be jolly sport to strike you out, captain."

"Don't get the swelled head, Merriwell! Don't think you can strike everybody out! That is what spoils a good pitcher."

"You are right, Hardy," nodded Frank, seriously. "The pitcher who is forever trying to strike out every batter who faces him soon kills himself. It is the man who holds them down to small hits who makes the success."

Hardy nodded, cooling down somewhat.

"That is sensible talk," he said. "I was afraid you had a bug in your nut. A fellow with a bug is N. G."

Tom Thornton followed Jones. One strike was called on him, and then he cracked out a hot one, which the short-stop fumbled long enough to let the batter reach first.

Then, to the surprise of all, Joe Gamp took his place on the coaching line near first.

"I swear if he isn't going to coach!" cried a voice. "Well, this will be a riot!"

"A-haw! a-haw! a-haw!" roared Gamp, clapping his thigh. "If this ain't the gug-gug-gug-greatest pup-pup-pup-pup-pup-picnic I ever struck! Why, this is more fun than chasin' a yalliar cuc-cuc-caow all over a forty-acre pasture lot! A-haw! a-haw! a-haw!"

That laugh was infectious, others caught it, and the crowd roared.

"Fun!" shouted Harry Rattleton, from a position on the coach line over by third. "It's more fun than bodging dulleets—I mean dodging bullets."

Hodge was the third man to come to the bat.

Noon believed he knew Bart's weakness, and he motioned for a slow drop.

Haggerty faced the batter.

"Nun-nun-nun-now you're off!" shouted Gamp to the runner. "Pup-pup-pup-play away off. He can't cuc-cuc-catch you in a year! Oh, what a good time! A-haw! a-haw! a-haw!"

Haggerty snapped the ball over to first, but Thornton got back all right, and Joe Gamp roared again.

"It is a farce, isn't it?" smiled Frank, speaking in Capt. Hardy's ear. "My team seems to be having fun with yours, old man."

"Oh, wait some," advised Hardy. "You will laugh out of the other side of your mouth in a minute."

"Just keep that little cuss tut-tut-tut-throwing, Tom," said Gamp. "Pup-pup-pretty soon he'll get excited and tut-tut-tut-throw it a mile."

But Haggerty did not make another attempt to catch the runner. He suddenly sent in a straight one for Bart, making it high.

Bart struck at it—and missed.

Frank was surprised, for Hodge, as a rule, could hit high ones.

"Oh, he is easy," cried Ned Noon, derisively. "We'll have him going after sky-scrapers in a minute."

"So that is the man you have been recommending, Merriwell," said Capt. Hardy. "And he wastes his strength on a ball like that. Any boy would have known that was a rod too high."

"Wait a little yet," advised Frank. "He may be a trifle anxious just now, for he knows everybody is watching him. I'll wager my life that he shows up all right directly."

"He hasn't done anything in the game yet."

"He hasn't been given a chance, has he?"

"Well, not much of a chance," Hardy was forced to confess.

Down by first Joe Gamp was stammering and haw-hawing, and it was plain that his talk was getting Haggerty a little nervous. The grin had vanished from the face of the pitcher, and his jaws were working convulsively over the chew of gum. He tried Hodge on a low drop, but Bart let it pass. Then he sent in a rise, and Hodge went for it.

To the surprise of both Haggerty and Noon, Hodge hit the ball. It was a frightful crack, and away flew the sphere toward left field.

"Run!" roared the coaches, and Hodge raced down to first, while Thornton went flying toward second.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

MERRIWELL'S NINE LEADS.

"Costigan will get it!" cried several voices, as the stocky left fielder raced back after the ball.

"He can't reach it!" cried others.

"Gamp ought to be out there now," shouted somebody.

The coachers yelled and motioned for the runners to keep right on, for it was plain that the ball was going over Costigan's head.

Thornton dashed over second and made for third. He was running fast, but Hodge seemed to fly.

"Watch Hodge cover ground," called Frank in Capt. Hardy's ear. "How is that for running?"

Hardy did not say a word, but he was astonished, for he did not dream Hodge could run so fast. Frank Merriwell was a swift man on the bases, but it seemed that Bart Hodge was getting along quite as fast as Frank could.

Costigan strained every nerve to get under the ball, and made a flying leap into the air for it, but it was just beyond his reach, and he did not even touch it.

"Gamp would have caught it," somebody declared.

While the left fielder was chasing the ball, which went bounding along the ground, the runners were making a streak round the diamond. When Thornton passed over third, Hodge was halfway between second and third. When Thornton crossed the plate, Hodge was close at his heels, and both men scored.

"Th-th-th-thutteration!" shouted Joe Gamp, in delight. "Ain't this a ju-ju-jolly time! A-haw! a-haw! a-haw!"

Capt. Hardy looked disgusted. Was it possible Frank Merriwell's remarkable "scrub" team was going to hold

the regular's good play? It would be a standing joke in the college.

"Come, Haggerty!" he cried, sharply; "you'll have to brace up. We're out here for practice, and not to fool away our time."

Haggerty flushed, but said nothing. He had not thought of fooling, and he did not relish being called down in such a manner.

Ned Noon was the most disgusted man on the field. Beneath his breath he muttered bitterly.

"Such beastly luck!" he muttered. "Think of Hodge getting a home run the first time up! It is frightful! I must do something to attract attention to me."

He wondered what he could do, but resolved to watch his opportunity. Unfortunately for Noon, Haggerty was a trifle rattled, and that made him wild.

Fales was the next batter up. Haggerty was so wild that Fales might have obtained four balls, but he struck at two poor ones. Then, with the score standing two strikes and three balls, Fales struck again at an inshoot and missed.

Right there was where Noon's hard luck came in, for Haggerty had crossed signals with him. Noon had expected an outdrop, but it was a high inshoot. Ned made a desperate attempt to stop it, but simply got his hands on it, and it went caroming off to one side, while Fales ran for first and made the bag all right.

"Look here, Noon," came sharply from Capt. Hardy's lips, when Ned had recovered the ball and thrown it in, "you must get a brace on. What are you under the bat for?"

"It wasn't my fault," declared Ned. "Haggerty crossed signs with me."

That made Capt. Hardy angry with Haggerty, and he called him in to the bench, sending Walbert out.

Walbert had not warmed up, and what he had seen made him feel a trifle nervous. This was not like a practice game. It seemed to be a game for blood.

The spectators realized that the fate of more than one player depended on their work in that game. Capt. Hardy was merciless, and he would not hesitate to lop off the head of any man he considered weak. He had no favorites, and he was fearless in the way he handled the team. His power was great, as he was manager, as well as captain.

Rattleton followed Fales. He popped up an easy one to shortstop who got under it and dropped it purposely, trying to draw Fales off first to make a double. But Fales knew that trick, and he hugged the bag.

Rattleton was out.

Diamond came next. He hit a hot one straight at Walling, the third baseman, and it was gathered in, putting the side out.

But at the end of the first inning, the score stood 2 to 0 in favor of the "scrubs."

"Now, I do hope they'll get on to Merriwell," muttered Sydney Gooch, who was looking very serious. "This is not the kind of fun I came out to see."

"Same here," admitted Bink Stubbs. "But it can't continue. Merriwell's gang has had a streak."

The first man up for the regulars got a fine safe hit.

Both Gooch and Stubbs brightened.

"Ah! what did I tell you!" said Harris. "I knew it would come. Now, if the others will keep it up."

He did not know that Frank had given the batter a good one, hoping he would get a single. Frank wanted Hodge to have a chance to show his throwing.

Merry was sure the runner would be sent down to second for a steal if he was given a show. He did not pretend to hold the fellow close to the bag, believing it a good plan

to let him get a start, for it would make Bart's throwing show up all the better if the man should be caught.

Diamond knew what was coming, for he understood that Merry was working to show Bart up, and he hugged close to second.

As Merry had anticipated, the batter made a false swing when the ball was pitched, hoping to bother Bart, while the runner scooted for second.

Hodge gathered in the ball, and then, without stirring from his tracks, sent it shooting down toward second like a bullet.

It was a low throw, and it seemed that it must strike the ground before it got to second; but there was force behind that ball, and it did not fall.

"Slide! slide!" yelled the coaches.

The runner slid.

Diamond came in just right to take the ball about two feet from the ground, and then he "nailed" it on to the back of the sliding base-runner, catching him at least two feet from the bag.

"Man is out," announced the umpire.

Frank laughed, and the spectators applauded.

"Good boy, Hodge!" cried Danny Griswold, to the surprise of Frank. "That was a beautiful throw."

"Oh, those things will happen now and then," sneered Ned Noon. "He might throw wild next time."

This did not come with good grace from Ned's lips, as he and Bart were rivals, but he was so overflowing with spleen that he could not hold it back.

"It was a good throw," nodded Capt. Hardy. "I didn't think he had a chance to catch the man after the start Merriwell gave him. If Hodge can keep up the work he has been doing——"

He did not finish, but there was a deep significance in the hiatus.

The next batter obtained a single, and again a man was given a chance to play off first by Merriwell, who seemed remarkably careless.

Down he went for second on the first pitched ball.

"He'll make it?"

"Hodge can't stop him!"

"He's a runner!"

"See him scoot!"

"He's fairly flying."

Hodge did not seem to get excited in the least, but he made a quick, sharp throw for second.

Again Diamond came in and took it on the run. Again the runner slid. Again Jack bored the ball into his back. And again——

"Man is out!" cried the umpire.

"Hodge is all right!" said several voices. "He is a corker to throw!"

Bart was arousing admiration by his cool, steady work. Ned Noon saw this, and ground his teeth in fury.

It was Noon's turn to come to bat. He advanced, resolved to do something or drop dead in the attempt.

A gleam entered Frank Merriwell's eyes. He gathered himself. Two men had been allowed to hit; but if Ned Noon got a hit he would earn it. Then Merriwell sent them over with all kinds of twists and curves. Ned was fooled. He fanned three times, flung his bat to the ground and uttered a curse.

The regulars had failed to score in their half of the second inning.

CHAPTER XL.

A GOOD FINISH.

Walbert did his prettiest. He struck out one of the "scrub," and then the bases were filled. It looked like several more scores for Merriwell's side.

Walbert set his teeth and pitched. He realized that he was working for a place on the 'varsity nine, and never had he done better. He struck out another man. Then the next batter sent a long one straight out to the center fielder, who gathered it in and the inning ended.

The spectators were greatly interested, for it was a hot game, something they had not expected. They began to chaff the regulars. Some of them said Merriwell's team was the right one to represent Yale on the diamond that season.

Browning had not been given much work, but, to his own surprise, he was wide awake. The excitement of the game had aroused him from his lethargy.

Up to the close of the fourth inning the score stood 2 to 0 in favor of the "scrub." Merriwell's men did not seem able to obtain another score, although they came near it several times.

In the fourth inning, aided by a hit, a fumble and a dropped ball, the regulars ran in one score. Then Merriwell put on steam, and shut them off.

The fifth inning proved a whitewash for both sides, and the sixth began with the game standing 2 to 1 in favor of Merriwell.

The regulars were first to bat, and Capt. Hardy had a talk to them. He told them they must beat the "scrub." He told them it would be a disgrace to be beaten by the

"scrub." He told them they were playing for something more than the game, and they understood him. Several of them were playing for positions on the nine.

Merriwell resolved to do his best to keep the regulars from making another score. He was laughing when he went into the box, but there was a serious purpose in his heart.

Gooch and Stubbs were two very disgusted fellows.

"This isn't what we came out to see," muttered the former.

"Not much!" said Stubbs. "Why, the 'varsity nine can't play marbles! Harvard and Princeton will walk all over 'em. I'll bet on it."

"Is it always luck?" asked Gooch, hesitatingly.

"Of course it is!" snarled Stubbs.

The last inning began, and the two haters of Merriwell watched it in despair.

The first man up was out on an easy one to Rattleton, who lined it across to Browning. Bruce gathered it in, smothering it in his glove and yawning at the same time.

The next man got a hit. He could not steal second, for he did not dare try, as Hodge had caught every man who tried it. But the following man hit the ball to Fales, who fumbled it, and then threw wild to first.

Over second scooted the runner, and he reached third ahead of the ball.

That placed a man on second and one on third.

Stubbs and Gooch brightened up.

"Here's where they win the game!" cried the former.

Frank continued to smile. He did not seem at all anxious.

The next batter obtained two balls and then had a strike called on him. He hit the next one and once more it shot straight at Fales.

The man on third took a desperate chance and scooted for home.

Fales saw the runner going, and he was so anxious to stop that score that he fumbled again. He got the ball at last and threw home, but it was a bit too late, for the man had scored.

The game was tied.

Then Frank was in earnest, and the way he pitched was a surprise to the two men who faced him. They did not even foul the ball, and both struck out.

The sixth inning closed with the score a tie. Frank was anxious to play another inning, but Capt. Hardy seemed satisfied.

He said such practice was too much like business, and the game was over.

But the "scrub" was hilarious over the result. It was almost equal to beating.

Some time after the game Frank and Capt. Hardy were seen talking together on the campus.

Ned Noon was strolling along when he saw them. From the fence Bink Stubbs called to him:

"What do you think?"

"I don't think," returned Ned, sourly. "It's too much trouble."

"See those chaps over there?" and Bink jerked his thumb toward Frank and Phil.

"Yes."

"Merriwell is cooking your goose."

"I suppose so. Well, let him cook it. I'll get back at him some time!"

"That's the talk!" said Stubbs, approvingly. "I hope you'll do it, too!"

Noon sauntered on.

That evening Hodge came hurrying into Merriwell's room, a look of satisfaction on his face.

"Old man," he cried, with unusual enthusiasm, "I want to thank you! You have worked it!"

"Worked what?"

"Got me on for a trial."

"On the nine?"

"Yes, Capt. Hardy told me just now that I am to have a trial in the game against Williams next Saturday."

Frank sprang to his feet.

"Congratulations, old chum!" he cried, extending his hand. "I wanted you behind the bat, and, if you are given a fair show, you will stay there. We have worked together before, and we'll try it again for the sake of old Yale—dear old Yale!"

Bart clasped the extended hand. It was a warm clasp, the clasp of true friendship.

On Saturday the ball game came off. There was a tremendous crowd on hand to witness the game and not a little betting on the result.

At first matters seemed to go against Yale and more than one groan of dismay went up.

Capt. Hardy was very anxious to win and made such a desperate two-base run in the sixth inning that he dropped down utterly exhausted, much to his friends' surprise.

But after that occurrence the Yale team braced up. Frank never worked better and Hodge did equally well, and at the conclusion the score stood 4 to 5 in favor of Old Eli.

"We won, but it was close," said Bruce Browning.

And all realized that this was true—the score was altogether too close for comfort—considering the heavy games still to be played.

CHAPTER XLI.

MORE BASEBALL TALK.

"Poor old Yale!" said Ben Halliday, mournfully.

"Poor old Yale!" echoed Dismal Jones, with something like a sob.

"Oh, what's the use of squealing before we know whether we are hurt or not?" cried Puss Parker. "Old Eli has a way of coming out on top at the last moment."

"It's a mighty slim show she has now," said Pink Pooler, and it almost seemed that there was something like satisfaction in his voice. "If she can't do better than beat little Williams by one score, what can she do against Princeton? Nat Finch is one of the finest amateur pitchers in this country, and he will make monkeys of Yale's ordinary batters, while our best men will stand a poor show against him."

"How did Princeton get hold of such a fellow?" asked Halliday.

"I don't know, but I am willing to bet something that his tuition does not cost him anything."

"If we could prove that we could end his career as a pitcher in the college league," said Halliday.

"But it can't be proved," said Pooler, quickly, "and so Princeton has us by the neck."

"I wouldn't bet that way if I could get odds," grunted Bruce Browning, as he came loafing up to the fence on the Yale campus, where the little knot of lads were holding the earnest discussion. "Princeton is not so many, and Finch is not the only shirt in the laundry. He can be done up."

"He'll never be done up by Yale," declared Pooler, lighting a cigarette.

"Look here, man!" cried Ben Halliday, turning sharply on Pink, "what is the matter with you? You talk as if anxious for Princeton to beat Yale."

"That's so," nodded Jones, giving Pooler a sour look.

"You ought to know better than that," said Pink, protestingly; "but I have got eyes, and I do know something about baseball. When Yale has a struggle to beat little Williams in a practice game, she is not going to stand much of a show in the college league."

Browning grunted.

"Huah! Yale has a way of starting out weak at the beginning of the season and making a rattling finish. You forget that, Pooler."

"No, but that does not happen every time."

"Pretty near it."

"There was a time, not so many moons ago," began Dismal Jones, in his queer way, "when it was thought that Yale's one weak point was behind the bat."

"That's been settled," said Browning.

"Oh, I don't know," grinned Pooler.

"What's the matter with Hodge?" quickly asked Halliday.

"It was his pretty work that saved the game with Williams," declared Parker.

"That's once," said Pooler, meaningly.

"Merriwell says he can do it right along."

"Merriwell says many things."

"And you can bet your life that what he says goes!" came with unusual warmth from Browning. "I've seen Hodge work before, and he's all right."

"They say he has a nasty temper," said Pink. "Sometimes he gets mad and sulks."

"Merriwell can handle him any time."

"It's always Merriwell, Merriwell, Merriwell!" sneered Pooler. "He is a good man, but most of the fellows seem to think he's a phenom. It makes me tired!"

"He has done some phenomenal work," said Parker. "Take the football game with——"

"Oh, that's ancient history! You fellows don't seem to get over that football game."

"He did some fine twirling last season."

"And spoiled his arm in the last hard game he pitched."

"It didn't look that way when he pitched for the 'scrub' against the regulars, and made a draw game of it. It struck me that he was in fine trim."

"He worked for all there was in him that day," declared Pooler, "and I have it straight that he has been tending his arm since then as if it were a sick baby. He does it up in arnica and witch hazel, and keeps it bandaged all the time. He wasn't in condition to go in and save the Williams game."

"He didn't have to," grunted Browning.

"He was needed badly enough. It was Hodge's three-bagger in the ninth that brought in two scores when two men were out, and saved the game. I claim that hit was an accident. That being the case, it was an accident that beat Williams. If Merriwell could have gone in and saved the game, why didn't they put him in?"

"I'll tell you why," said Parker. "They were saving him and they wanted to test the stuff in Haggerty and Walbert."

"You know Haggerty said he knew the weak points of almost all the Williams men," said Halliday. "That was why he was kept in so long."

"Well, Williams didn't do a thing to Mr. Haggerty!" grinned Pink. "He was hammered beautifully, and they used Walbert fully as bad. Anyone with sense will say those two men are no good, and surely it isn't sense to

think Merriwell can pitch every game for Yale and give us a winning team."

"It doesn't strike me you know much about pitchers and pitching," yawned Browning. "If you did, you would not be in such a hurry to judge Haggerty and Walbert by their first game. The best pitchers have streaks when anybody can hit them, and those streaks come when they are least expected. There is nothing so unreliable as a first-class baseball pitcher. He may win a dozen hard games, and then, for no apparent reason, lose one that everybody considers dead easy."

Pooler knew this was true, but he felt the sting of the big fellow's slowly drawled words, and he snapped:

"I'll guarantee that I know as much about baseball as you do. You did play on the 'scrub' with Merriwell, but you didn't have any work. If you had—well, you are not the most wide-awake man in college."

Pooler felt that he was safe in making this talk, for Browning would not exert himself sufficiently to resent it by personal violence.

Beyond a grunt, Bruce did not seem to resent it at all.

Parker hastened to say something.

"I don't think there is any reason why we should be frightened because Princeton put up a good game against the New Yorks to start off with, while we made a poor showing against Williams. That doesn't settle it."

"Last year New York beat the packing out of us at the Polo Grounds," said Halliday, "but we won the college championship just the same."

"That only goes to show how much stronger Princeton is than we are."

"It goes to show that you can't tell what Yale will do by the way she starts off."

"I'll tell you this," said Bruce; "Hodge works much better with Merriwell in the box than with anybody else."

Everybody says he played great ball last Saturday. He will play much better next Saturday, for Merriwell will pitch then."

"The battery isn't the whole nine," said Pooler. "Hodge and Merriwell can't do the batting, base-running and fielding for all the others."

Joe Gamp came hurrying toward the little knot. He was excited and breathless.

"I say, bub-bub-boys," he stammered, "have you heard the latest nun-nun-nun-nun-nun——"

"Whistle, Joe!" cried Halliday and Parker, together.

The excited lad began again:

"I say, bub-bub-boys, have you heard the latest nun-nun-nun-nun—I say, bub-bub-boys, have you heard the lul-lul-lul-lul—— I say, bub-bub-bub-bub—— I sus-sus-sus-sus-sus——"

"Whistle quick, Joe," cried Halliday. "You are going backward, and you won't be able to start at all in a minute.

Joe began the third time:

"I sus-sus-sus-sus"—whistle—"say boys, have you heard the latest nun-nun-nun-nun"—whistle—"the latest news?"

"We're not liable to hear it if we wait for him to tell it," muttered Pooler, scornfully.

"What is the latest news?" asked Parker.

"Phil Hardy, cuc-cuc-cuc-captain of the 'vuv-'vuv-'varsity nine——"

"What about him?" asked several.

"Cuc-cuc-cuc-cuc"—whistle—"can't pup-pup-pup-play any more this sus-sus-sus-sus"—whistle—"this season!" shouted Gamp.

Cries of astonishment broke from the boys. Browning seemed to awaken from the trance that was on him, and he grasped Gamp by the arm, taking hold so strongly that Joe cringed.

"What's that you say?" demanded the big fellow, fiercely.

"Phil Hardy can't play any more this season?" questioned Parker.

"Did you say that?" demanded Halliday.

Gamp nodded.

"Dud-dud-dud-doctor said so," he declared.

"Whew!" whistled Pooler. "That knocks the backbone out of the 'varsity nine."

No one paid any attention to him, but Browning growled at Gamp.

"How do you know this? Are you sure it's straight?"

"Sus-sus-Sile Blossom told me, and he is Hardy's ch-ch-chum."

"Then it is straight, for Uncle Blossom never jokes," said Bruce, in deep dismay.

There was general consternation among the fellows gathered there at the fence.

"Poor old Yale!" exclaimed Halliday, for the second time.

"Poor old Yale!" again echoed Dismal Jones.

"Now," said Pooler, "it is a sure thing that Yale does not stand a show in baseball this season."

Bruce Browning turned savagely upon Pink—so savagely that Pooler was startled.

"You make me sick!" growled the big fellow. "You're always croaking! You have been stuck good and hard betting against Yale, and I hope you'll be stuck again if you bet against her this year!"

"That's all right," said Pooler, sullenly. "I have a right to my convictions. I'd like to see Yale win as well as anybody, but my good judgment tells me she can't win."

"Your good judgment is not worth a hoot! It has told

you she could not win before, but she has won just the same."

"Perhaps it's not so bad," said Parker. "Why, Hardy is in the pink of condition. Why should any doctor forbid his playing?"

"He's been having queer spells lately whenever he's got excited and worked hard," said Halliday. "In the Williams game, you know, he fell limp as a rag in Jeffers' arms after making a hot run for two bases. It didn't seem that he'd be able to get his breath again. They fanned him and turned water on him till they came near drowning him."

"That was the first time I ever saw anything out of the way with the fellow."

"What is the matter with him, anyway?" asked Pooler. "Why has the doctor ordered him not to play?"

"Heart tut-tut-trouble," explained Gamp. "He's liable to drop dead some tut-tut-time when he exerts himself too much."

The boys looked at each other in doleful silence. The news had cast a deep gloom over them.

"Who'll be captain now?" said Halliday. "You ought to know, Parker."

"How should I know?" asked Puss. "I don't have anything to do with the management of the team. It's all I can do to play first base."

"Well, who do you think stands the best chance?"

"Frank Merriwell."

Pooler started and scowled.

"I hope they won't be fools enough to put him in!" he said. "His head is swelled enough now. He'll feel so big that he won't be worth anything if he is made captain."

"Oh, how can you say that!" exclaimed Sidney Gooch,

who had joined the crowd. "Mr. Merriwell is such a splendid fellow!"

Sidney was a hypocrite. No one in college hated Frank more than Gooch, but he pretended to admire Merry greatly. In his sneaking way he lost no opportunity to injure Frank, but he never came out openly like an honorable foe.

Of the two fellows, Pink Pooler was far the more manly, but that was not saying much for him.

Bruce Browning was angry. He grasped Pooler by the collar and shook him till his teeth rattled together.

"You envious whelp!" roared the big fellow. "You know Frank Merriwell is not troubled with the swelled head. What you deserve is a punch in the jaw, but I'd be ashamed if I gave it to you, so you get off without it."

Then he gave Pooler a fling that sent the fellow staggering.

All were astounded by this display of energy on Browning's part, for it was a rare thing that anything could arouse him.

But Bruce was loyal to Frank Merriwell. He had been Frank's foe when Merry first came to Yale, but, when he was dropped a class and found himself received in a manly manner by Merriwell, he suddenly changed from a foe to a stanch friend.

No one but Frank seemed able to handle the big, lazy fellow, but Merriwell could do anything with Bruce. He even succeeded in inducing him to play first base on the "scrub" ball team, and Browning had not made a single error.

Pooler ground his teeth together and gave Browning a fierce look, but he let it go at that, for he knew the big fellow was strong as a giant.

"Merriwell will make a good captain," said Ben Halliday. "He has a knack of getting more out of a lot of

fellows than anybody I know. If they put him in Hardy's place, the nine will not suffer."

"It wouldn't surprise me a bit if you were right," purred Sidney Gooch.

"I am not going to give up that Hardy can't play at all till I hear it from his lips," said Parker.

"You may as well give it up," declared a voice, and Bart Hodge joined the group. "It is straight goods, fellows. I've just had a talk with Capt. Hardy."

They turned eagerly to the dark-faced, proud-looking lad, and plied him with questions. All he could tell them was substantially the same as they had learned from Gamp. Capt. Hardy had been examined by competent physicians, and he had been ordered to drop baseball and refrain from all kinds of violent exertion.

"It's a shame!" groaned Jones. "Just at this time Yale can't afford to lose a single good man."

"Don't you worry a bit," said Hodge. "If Merriwell is made captain of the team, Yale will not lose anything. I know Phil Hardy is a dandy, but Frank Merriwell is another."

Somebody laughed scornfully and shortly.

Hodge looked round quickly, his face flushing crimson.

"Laugh!" he exclaimed. "I know what I am talking about! I have traveled with Frank Merriwell, and he is all right."

"From his head up," said a voice.

"Oh, it's you, is it, Pooler. Well, you are the one I'd expect would make such a remark."

Pooler strode forward, scowling blackly.

"Why, you miserable fool!" he snarled; "do you dare talk to me like that? I'll—I'll——"

Hodge looked Pink straight in the eyes.

"I am going to tell you now that I do not think but little of you, Mr. Pooler," he said. "You are always

croaking. Now you are howling about Yale's ball team. I'm willing to bet fifty dollars that Yale beats Princeton next Saturday, and I'll bet fifty more she wins the college championship."

Pooler was digging down into his pockets.

"Money talks!" he cried. "It's a shame to rob a fool, but I can't stand everything. Here is my money. I'll put it in the hands of Gooch."

"Put it in Halliday's hands and I will cover it," said Hodge, hotly.

"All right. I'm not fussy. Halliday suits me."

The money was staked and covered.

CHAPTER XLII.

THE DOUBLE SHOOT.

"You have speed to burn, Merry," cried Bart Hodge, as he rounded up on catching a ball that had come flying like a bullet from Frank's hand. "There must be powder behind those whistlers."

Frank laughed. His hat, coat and vest were off, and he was perspiring freely. Together with Bart, he was putting in a little practice. Frank was in the pink of condition. His eyes were clear and bright, his complexion almost girlish in its pink-and-white, while his legs, arms, muscles, all were firm and hard. The flesh of his arm, from which the sleeve was rolled back, was white as marble.

"Some of the fellows who have been croaking about your 'dead wing' will drop dead when they see you shoot 'em over," said Hodge, his face glowing with enthusiasm and earnestness.

"There are always croakers, Bart," said Frank, indifferently. "A fellow is a fool if he permits them to bother him."

"They make me thundering mad."

"Mustn't notice them."

"Can't help it."

"Can if you try."

"No. I am not built like you."

"It all comes of practice. If you keep trying, in a short time you get so you do not notice it at all. Get on to this twist, old man."

Then Frank made a jumping motion with his body, but

held his feet on the ground, and sent in a ball that made Bart blink and gasp.

"Talk about chain-lightning!" cried Hodge. "Why, that one was a regular dodger! How'd you do it, Frank? or did my eyes fool me?"

Merriwell laughed heartily over Bart's surprise.

"I call that my double shoot," he explained. "I'll give it to you again."

Bart tossed back the ball, and Frank carefully wound his fingers round it; then made the jumping motion, sending it whizzing through the air again.

This time Hodge dodged and let it go past.

"Scissors!" he cried. "That fooled me. I thought it was going the other way. It took a queer shoot on the last end."

Again Frank laughed.

"That was the double curve the other way," he said.

Hodge trotted back to the netting and got the ball. As he came down with it, he said:

"I'd like to know when you got onto that quirk. I've heard of 'zigzag curve pitching,' but I never took any stock in it. I don't see how it is possible to give a ball two motions, so it will curve in and then turn and curve out without stopping."

"I discovered the trick by accident," confessed Frank. "It's a hard one, and no man can use it much, for it will knock the stuffing out of his wrist if he does. You know a drop-ball pitcher soon uses himself up. Well, this is worse on a fellow than pitching the drop."

"What does it do?"

"Makes the back of the wrist lame, right here," and Frank touched the spot. "There is a snap to it that does the job. The motion of the ball when it leaves the fingers gives it one curve, and the other curve is given to it by the snap of the wrist."

"Say, Merry."

"Yes."

"Don't tell anybody about this."

"Don't worry."

"Because if you do, they won't believe it. There's not one old ball player in a hundred who will believe any pitcher can make a ball curve in and out without stopping. There is such a thing as an outdrop, but a double-shoot—Great Scott! it will be the sensation of the season!"

"I don't propose to use it much."

"I should say not!"

"It will be a great thing on some occasions."

"You bet! Why, it'll paralyze a batter! He'll think he's got 'em."

Frank pitched two more of those queer curves, and then stopped, saying he did not dare to follow it up, for fear of hurting his wrist.

"Look here, Merry," cried Bart; "you'll have to let me know when you are going to do that, or I'll have a passed ball sure. And I want to know what the final curve will be, too. Can you pitch a rise and a drop the same as you do this in and out?"

Frank shook his head.

"I have tried all sorts of ways, but I can't pitch a ball that will have a double motion up and down. Some fellow may strike it some time, but I am inclined to think it an impossibility."

"Did you ever see a pitcher who could pitch a double-shoot before you?"

"Yes."

"Who?"

"Billy Mains."

"Who's Billy Mains?"

"He's a tall, angular Yankee from somewhere down in Maine—Windham is the town, I believe."

"Where did you see him?"

"With the Bostons."

"I don't remember him."

"He was not given a fair trial. He pitched the last three innings of the opening game at Boston between Boston and Baltimore last season. The first Baltimore batter to face Mains thought he had the jim-jams, sure, for Mains started an outshoot, and, while the batter stood with his stick poised, expecting the ball would pass two feet beyond the plate, the sphere curved in round his neck and glanced off the end of his bat. The fellow was so astonished he dropped his bat and fell down himself trying to get out of the way after the ball had passed. He may have thought from the curves it had that it might turn round and come back his way. I was sitting in the grand-stand directly behind the catcher, so I plainly saw the double curve of the ball. A hundred others saw it, and half of them uttered cries of astonishment. One old man said he had been following baseball for seventeen years, but never had he seen anything like that before. Right then I resolved to find out how to make that curve, and I have been working at it ever since. One day, when I wasn't thinking of it, I happened to throw an out with a peculiar snap of my wrist. I saw it take the double curve, and I was lucky enough to remember just how I did it. After that I kept at it till I was sure of throwing it when I wanted to, but I tried it so much I came near knocking my wrist out."

"That's it!" cried Bart. "That's how the story started that you had a 'dead wing.' The fellows knew you had lamed your arm, but they did not see how you did it with the amount of throwing you did."

"The wonder to me now is that I did not lame it more. I was working at it altogether too much."

"This Mains, what became of him?"

"Oh, he has been in the New England League and the Eastern League since his trial with Boston."

"Do you consider him a good man?"

"He has one bad fault."

"What's that?"

"He's wilder than a hawk at times, and he is liable to weaken or go to pieces when the batters fall on him. But for that, he is fast enough for the National League. I consider him a better man than lots of pitchers in the National League, and he will get there some day, too."

"I should think his double-shoot would land him in the big league."

"I don't believe he can control it, and, after he uses it, he seems to get wild right away. It knocks him out."

"Isn't it going to do that with you, Merry?"

"Can't tell," confessed Frank. "If it does, I won't use it except on a pinch at the very last end of a game when everything depends on striking out a good batter. It will be valuable if I don't use it more than three or four times for the season."

Hodge nodded.

"It might save the championship. Nobody can tell. What do you know about Nat Finch, the new Princeton man?"

"Nothing, save what I have heard in the way of gossip and what I have read in the papers."

"Everybody seems to think he's a terror."

"He must be a good man, or he would not have such a reputation. But he will have his bad days, like the rest of us."

"We can't expect to win the pennant on his bad days."

"Not much. Harvard is not making such a blow as Princeton, but she will put a strong team in the field."

"What do you know about Harvard?"

"I know she will be in it with both feet. To-day I consider Harvard fully as dangerous as Princeton."

"She is not generally considered so."

"I know it, but Harvard is coming in these days. I'll tell you something. If Yale does not win the pennant this year, Harvard will."

Hodge was surprised, and he showed it; for, like others, he had regarded Princeton as Yale's most dangerous rival. Never before had he heard Frank so freely express an opinion as to the situation.

Bart knew Frank well enough to feel confidence in his judgment on baseball.

"Where is Harvard's strong point?" he asked.

"The whole team," declared Frank. "They are not making a great howl over one pitcher, for they have two good men left over from last season, besides any new men that may develop. Reports from Cambridge say they are putting in plenty of practice. They are getting in team work, and team work pays. A nine of brilliant individual players will often be slaughtered by an inferior nine simply because the latter is well up in team work. Yale should have more practice in team work, I think."

"Perhaps you'll have a chance to take charge of her practice. You know Phil Hardy is out of it, and——"

"There's very little chance for me," said Frank, quietly.

"Why not?"

"Because the only way I would accept the position is on certain conditions, and the committee will never agree to those conditions."

CHAPTER XLIII.

RATTLETON'S WARNING.

Hodge felt no little curiosity to know what those conditions were, but, as Merriwell did not show an inclination to state them, he refrained from asking questions.

Bart had begun to understand Frank very well, and he could tell when Merry wished to talk and when he chose to be silent. With rare good judgment, Hodge seldom attempted to induce Frank to talk when he showed a disposition to be reticent.

Merriwell rolled down his sleeve and picked up his coat. He felt that he had practiced quite enough for the time.

Just then Harry Rattleton entered the park and approached hurriedly, his face betraying no small amount of excitement.

"I want to Merry you, see—I mean I want to see you, Merry," he spluttered.

"All right," smiled Frank. "Here I am. Take a good look at me."

"Want to tell you something."

"I will listen."

Harry cast a quick glance at Bart.

"Want to tell it to you privately," he said.

Bart turned and strolled away, pulling on his coat.

"Fire away," said Frank. "No one will hear you."

Rattleton seemed troubled about beginning. He stammered some, and then burst forth:

"Don't you do it, Merry—don't you do it! It's a put up job! Don't you do it!"

"If you'll tell me what it is," smiled Frank, "I may be able to tell you if there is any danger that I will do it."

"They're going to try to run you in."

"How run me in? Arrest me?"

"No, no! Run you in captain of the nine."

"Oh, is that what you are driving at?"

"Yes. I am dead on to the crooked game—I mean the crooked game!"

Harry was so excited that he twisted himself badly.

"What is the crooked game?" asked Frank. "You are talking in enigmas."

"It's a plot!"

"What kind of a plot?"

"A plot to put you in disgrace."

"How?"

"Everybody most seems to think the team we have now stands no show of winning the pennant."

"Well?"

"That's why they want to run you in captain."

"Think so?"

"Know so. I'm willing to bet Phil Hardy paid that doctor something to forbid him from playing. Hardy is a sharp one. He saw Yale stood no show, and he was sick. He wanted to get out, and he took that way of crawling."

Frank shook his head.

"I don't want to think that of Hardy," he soberly said. "I don't want to think any man that much a sneak. No, Rattles, you are dead wrong about Phil."

"I'm red dight—I mean dead right!" excitedly declared Harry. "You have too much confidence in human nature. You never will think a man crooked till it is proven for you, and then you don't like to believe it."

"What's the use?" said Frank, quietly. "I dislike to have my confidence in human nature shattered—I refuse to have it shattered. I know there is more good than bad in the world. The person who is forever looking for the

bad is the one who never sees the good, and he has no one but himself to blame. I am no pessimist."

"But you are a thundering fool sometimes!" blurted Rattleton. "I don't care a continental if you punch my head for saying so, but you are a fool sometimes!"

Instead of showing anger at these plain words, Frank beamed in a sunny manner, his red lips parting to show his gleaming white teeth.

"You are jolly original to-day, old man," he said, merrily. "You surprise me."

"Oh, say!" snapped Harry. "There isn't anything to laugh about. I am in earnest. Now, look here, Frank, I want to tell you something. By chance I heard some of your particular admirers talking about you."

"Who were they?"

"Gordan, Gooch, Pooler, Paulding and Marline."

"Marline's all right."

"I should think so!" burst forth Harry. "He's the fellow who was going to kill you!"

"In a fair duel."

"Oh, he's a bloodthirsty dog!"

"He has seemed friendly enough since our encounter."

"Hasn't dared be any other way. He was in the gang, and he doesn't like you any too much. He thinks you are holding your head too high, and he'd like to see you taken down several pegs."

"Well, what were they saying?"

"Saying Hardy got out because he saw Yale did not have a show this season. Saying that you would be made captain, and that you'd get all the blame for Yale's hard luck. They laughed over it like fiends. Oh, they were having a jolly time to think how it would pull you down."

Frank's lips closed and were pressed together. A hard, resolute look settled on his face, and still he smiled. There was confidence in that smile, and there was scorn in it.

"My enemies have thought the same thing about many things I have taken part in," he said, quietly.

"But this is different," Rattleton declared. "I tell you this is a plot, and I believe Phil Hardy is in it. He knew they would put you in captain, and that is why he got out. There's no more trouble with his heart than there is with mine."

"He has the doctor's certified statement."

"That's nothing. Bet he had to pay for it."

Still Frank refused to believe that. He had known Hardy but a short time, but he believed the fellow on the level. Phil had played fast ball on the team the season before, although he had not been friendly with Merriwell, who was one of the regular pitchers. He had been chosen to captain the nine, as well as manage it, and, with few exceptions, the choice was considered a good one. It did not seem possible now that because Yale had not turned out as strong a team as usual, Hardy had weakened and resorted to a trick to get out of his position of responsibility.

"You must remember, Rattles," said Frank, "that he had a bad spell in the game last Saturday."

"Made it."

"Then he is a corking actor."

"He didn't fool me."

Still Frank refused to be convinced.

"There is little danger that I'll be put in captain of the nine," he said.

"There is every danger of it. You are the very man who will be offered the place."

"But the committee will not accept my terms."

"Your terms?"

"That's what I said."

"Why, you——"

"I shall have a proposal to make to them."

Harry did not have such scruples about questioning Frank as troubled Hodge. His curiosity was aroused.

"What sort of a proposal will you make?" he asked.

Frank did not answer the question, for, at that moment, another man entered the park, saw Merriwell, and approached him swiftly.

"Hardy!" exclaimed Frank.

"Hardy!" cried Rattleton, softly. "He's up to something now. Look out for him, Merry! Don't be trapped."

CHAPTER XLIV.

CAPT. MERRIWELL.

Phil Hardy was an honest-looking fellow, and it was not remarkable that Merriwell did not believe him the crafty chap Rattleton represented him to be.

He came forward swiftly.

"You are the very man I am looking for, Mr. Merriwell," he said.

"Well, you have found me," smiled Frank.

"I thought I might find you here when I found you were not in your room or on the campus. You are wanted at a meeting of the directors of the ball team."

Rattleton gave Frank a warning look.

Hardy took hold of Merriwell's arm and led him away, while Hodge and Rattleton followed.

"It's a shame to drag Merry into this!" spluttered Harry.

"Into what?" asked Bart, innocently.

"Why, don't you know? They're after him to be captain of the 'varsity nine in Hardy's place."

"That's good."

"Good!" cried Harry. "It's a conspiracy—a plot—an outrage! That's what it is!"

"Oh, come off! What are you driving at, anyway? Are you nutty?"

"Not a bit of it, Hodge. I tell you it is a plot to hurt Frank! He's a fool if he lets them pull him into it after what I have told him! But, for all of his shrewdness about most things, he is easy sometimes. He wants to think everybody white. He is the kind of fellow who will let a chap walk all over him and then play the friend to that sort of a cur. That's where he makes his mistake."

Now Hodge was aroused, for Rattleton had touched him on a tender spot.

"You are wrong!" cried Bart, flushing. "No man walks all over Frank Merriwell. You never knew a fellow to get the best of Merriwell and hold his advantage. Frank is a fighter, and his worst enemies agree on that point, but he fights fair. He will not take an unfair advantage of his meanest and most sneaking enemies, and, for that very reason, the worst enemies he has respect him."

"Rot!"

"There is no rot about it. I know, for I was his enemy once, and I did everything in my power to injure him. I did not hesitate to resort to any sort of expedient, no matter how mean and sneaking. I did some very mean things, but still I could not get the best of Frank Merriwell. Sometimes I thought I had him, but I always found out my mistake. When I got him down I was unable to hold him. It made me furious, for I have a temper of my own and a little pride. I was fierce enough to kill him."

"Well, what does that prove?" impatiently asked Harry.

"Wait. I am not through. What I want to tell you is this: The more I tried to hurt Merriwell in a sneaking manner the lower I sunk in my own estimation, for I found that he knew what I had done, and yet he refused to get back at me in the same way, although he had opportunities enough. He would not lower himself to fight me with the same kind of weapons I was using. At first I thought him afraid of me——"

"That's it! that's it!" cried Rattleton. "That's just what they think of him when he goes easy with them."

"But I learned better than that after a time," Hodge went on. "I found out he was not afraid at all. It was

not cowardice, but it was courage. He was willing to fight me fairly while I took any mean advantage of him, and still he was not afraid I would get the best of him in the end. He felt himself my match, and I began to feel that he was a better man than I in every way. That was what hurt me most. I did not like to think that the fellow I hated was more honorable than I; I did not like to think he would scorn to strike me a foul blow, knowing all the while that I had struck him many such blows. I was forced to confess to myself that he was a squarer man than I, and that hurt me more than anything he could have done to me. It is the same with his enemies now. They know he is white, and they feel that they are sneaks. That galls them.

"Let Frank Merriwell alone, Rattleton. He has a level head, and he can take care of himself."

"Oh, you don't understand the situation now!" cried Harry, showing impatience. "That is plain enough. Frank is so square he would not dream anybody could pull him into the trap that is set for him. Now look here, Hodge, I want you to understand that I am just as much Merry's friend as you are, and I don't like to see him trapped. I have warned him, but I'll bet he'll let them fool him just the same."

"It's seldom he is fooled, old man. It may seem for a time that he is fooled, but, in the end, it turns out the other party is the one fooled."

"It can't turn out that way this time. I have been in college longer than you, Hodge, and I know something about what I am driving at. The 'varsity nine is in a bad way this season. It is weaker than it has been before in six years, while Princeton and Harvard are stronger. Yale's staunchest supporters say she has no show of winning the pennant. Now, right here is where the trick comes in. Phil Hardy is captain and manager. He

knows he will be blamed more or less for the fizzle Yale is bound to make, and he gets out in a hurry——”

“By his doctor’s orders.”

“Bah! Fake! Trickery! Can’t fool me that way! Doctor’s fush! I talk what I’m knowing about—I mean I know what I’m talking about. It was a trick. Hardy wanted to get out, and he took that way. Now, Merriwell is to be pulled in to fill the place, so all the blame may be piled on his shoulders. I’ve told him the whole business, and he will go in with his eyes open.”

“If you have told him, don’t worry about him,” said Bart, quietly. “He won’t be caught.”

“That’s what Hardy is after him for. I heard him say the directors of the ball team wanted to see him.”

“That’s all right. They will not trap Frank Merriwell. Don’t let that worry you.”

But Bart could not impart this feeling of confidence to Harry. They got on to the same car with Hardy and Merriwell, and Rattleton was uneasy and nervous all the way back to the college.

Harry wanted to get another word with Frank before the latter went before the directors, but Hodge held him back.

“I tell you to let him alone,” said Bart, sharply. “I should resent it if you kept after me in such a manner.”

“You needn’t worry!” snapped Harry. “I wouldn’t keep after you at all. If I took the trouble to warn you once, I’d let you go after that.”

“Surely Frank Merriwell is as shrewd as I am.”

The afternoon exercises were over. On the campus were gathered knots of students, all of whom seemed to be eagerly discussing something of general importance.

“They know what is up,” said Harry. “They are talking baseball.”

He was right. Almost the sole topic of conversation

on the Yale campus that afternoon was the baseball situation. The outlook for Yale was so dark that the most hopeful felt the shadow of gloom. Right on top of the loss of Capt. Hardy, Bink Stubbs had been conditioned, so that he must give up playing or take the chance of being dropped a class. The general feeling seemed to be that Yale's nine was all to pieces.

The appearance of Merriwell in company with Phil Hardy caused a stir.

"There goes the lamb to the slaughter," laughed Walter Gordan, who was in the midst of a little gathering of Merry's old-time foes.

"Wouldn't it be moah propah to say the cawfe?" drawled Willis Paulding, with a weak attempt at wit.

"Oh, he made himself a big gun by his work on the football team last fall," said Pooler, with a grin of satisfaction; "but he'll lose it all if he takes Hardy's place on the nine."

"He can't get Hardy's place," said Walt Forrest.

"Hey?" cried the others. "What do you mean by that? It's what they want him for."

"I guess not," grinned Forrest.

"Really?" questioned Sidney Gooch, in his smooth, insinuating way. "Why, that is what I heard."

"They may want him to be captain of the nine," said Forrest; "but he can't have Hardy's place. He will be substitute captain, and that is all. Besides that, Hardy was manager. I know for a fact that the directors intend to keep Hardy in manager just the same, so Merriwell will be under him."

"And I know for a fact," said Pooler, "that Phil Hardy has no intention of remaining manager. He knows better than that. Don't take that boy for a fool."

"You think—just what?"

"He wants to get out of it entirely."

"Because he thinks Yale has no show?"

"Sure."

"Aw! I think that is wight, don't yer 'now," drawled Paulding. "Some verwy fine fellows in Hawvard. I weally think they awe going to win this yeah."

No one paid any attention to Willis, for his opinion was not regarded as important.

"If Hardy gets out, Merriwell will be manager," said Walter Gordan, who was green with envy, although he was trying to hide it.

"Not on your life!" laughed Forrest. "The directors will attempt to manage the team themselves, and I pity the poor devil of a captain. He'll get it in the neck on all sides."

This caused a general laugh, for these fellows rejoiced to think of the trouble Frank Merriwell would get into.

"Weally," said Willis, again attempting to call some attention to himself, "I am wuther glad Hawvard has a show this yeah. I do not think it propah faw Yale to win all the time, deah boys."

"Oh, rats!" cried Gordon. "Harvard hasn't a show. It will be Princeton this year."

The others nodded.

"Finch will make monkeys of our poor fellows," said Pooler, with an attempt at dolefulness.

"What's the matter with you?" exclaimed Forrest. "You want to see Yale defeated?"

"Oh, really I protest!" cried Pooler.

"Still, as long as Merriwell has anything to do with the Yale team, it will give you satisfaction to see Yale defeated. You can't deny that," said Forrest.

"Oh, I'd rather see Yale win, for all of Merriwell, but I do not have so much sympathy with her when she loses if he plays."

"Say!" cried Forrest. "I want you to think of one little

thing. Yale seldom loses at anything when Frank Merriwell is in the game. He seems to be Old Eli's mascot."

"Of cawse, it's all beastly luck," put in Paulding. "He doesn't really have any more to do with it than any other good man would."

"You may think as you like about that," said Forrest, evasively; "but you must confess that he seems to bring Yale good luck. We thought she was a dead duck at football last fall, but he put new life and snap into the team, and Yale came out on top."

"He can't do that with the ball team," said Gordan. "There's where he'll meet his Waterloo."

"Let's see, Gordan," said Forrest, "I believe you and Merriwell were rivals for pitching honors the first year in college. He got on to the 'varsity nine, and you got left. Ha, ha! You haven't admired him since."

Gordan flushed.

"Oh, it wasn't that," he declared; "but he thinks he is so much. That's what makes me sick."

"We all have our reasons for not loving him," said Pooler. "It's no use to talk about that. The worst thing I wish him now is that they make him captain of the ball team."

Rattleton and Hodge drifted from knot to knot of the students on the campus, finding all were talking baseball. The events of the last few hours had stirred up the "sports" wonderfully.

Rattleton was excited and nervous. He was waiting for the reappearance of Frank Merriwell.

On the other hand, Hodge seemed unusually cool and unconcerned. Bart smiled whenever he heard fears expressed as to the result of the struggle for the pennant, and he smiled more when some one declared Yale did not have a show.

It was generally known that the directors meant to

appoint Merriwell captain of the nine, but there were not a few who declared Frank was too wise to accept the position at that late hour and under such unfavorable circumstances.

An hour passed. It was growing dark swiftly. Lamps were sending gleams of light from the windows of the quad. It was a mild spring night, and voices could be heard calling from the open windows. Over in South Middle a banjo was plunk-plunking. There were bursts of laughter now and then. Some fellow was whistling "Maggie Murphy's Home."

Still the "sports" lingered on the campus, waiting for Hardy and Merriwell to appear.

Rattleton was so nervous he could not hold himself still three seconds at a time. Hodge was not disturbed in the least.

"Here they come!"

Somebody uttered a cry. The former captain of the nine was seen approaching, with Frank Merriwell at his side. He was seen to grasp Frank by the arm and draw him toward the largest collection of students near the fence. Other students made a rush for that spot.

"Gentlemen," said Phil Hardy, speaking clearly and distinctly, "I wish to introduce to you my successor, Mr. Merriwell, who is now captain and manager of the 'varsity nine.'"

CHAPTER XLV.

FRANK'S TERMS.

"Three cheers for Capt. Merriwell!"

"Hurrah! hurrah! hurrah!"

"Three more for Manager Merriwell!"

"Hurrah! hurrah! hurrah!"

The pent-up feelings of the crowd burst forth in a wild roar of satisfaction.

"Now," rang out the clear voice of Charlie Creighton, as he scrambled up on the shoulders of two strong fellows and waved his cap in the air, "now give three cheers for plain Frank Merriwell, the whitest man, the truest sport, and the best all-round athlete in Yale! Wake 'em up!"

They did. The feeling of enthusiasm that seized upon them just then was intense, and they cheered and cheered again.

The windows of the quad filled. The news spread, and the cheering became general.

Harry Rattleton was numb with dismay.

"Manager and captain!" he gasped. "Gracious!"

Bart Hodge was palpitating with satisfaction.

"Manager and captain!" he cried. "Hurrah!"

On the outskirts of the crowd that had gathered so swiftly about the new captain was Walter Gordan, eating his heart out with envy.

"Oh, it's just his infernal luck!" Walter whimpered. "Hear the fools cheer for him! It's all they know!"

"Let them cheer now," Pink Pooler muttered in Gordan's ear. "The cheering will turn to groans after a few ball games have been played."

"I don't know," said Forrest, who had caught Pink's words. "He has been shrewd enough to get himself ap-

pointed manager, as well as captain. There is no telling what he may do with the team."

"It's too late for him to make it a winner," said Pooler, with satisfaction. "It takes time to build up a winning nine."

Frank's friends crowded about him, shaking his hand and congratulating him, with a few exceptions. Some of his friends were not enthusiastic over his appointment. Harry Rattleton was one of them. A few others thought the same as Harry about it.

But these were but few of the crowd that swarmed about Merry. Of course, some of those who shook his hand and expressed their delight were hypocritical, but the most of them were sincere.

Frank was modest. He smiled and said:

"Thank you, fellows. You are more than kind. It does one good to know he has such friends."

Harry Rattleton groaned.

"It seems to me Merry is getting to be a soft thing!" he muttered. "They have made a mark of him this time, and he walked into the trap with his eyes open."

Harry was disgusted. He had warned Frank, but Frank had not heeded the warning. From what he had overheard, Rattleton was sure it was a trap to injure Frank.

For a little while Harry was so disgusted that he went off by himself and declared he was glad of it, and that he hoped they would soak it to Frank.

Then he was ashamed of himself for wishing ill luck to such a friend, and he felt like punching somebody's head.

It was about this time that Andy Emery, on the way to his room, saw Rattleton standing all alone in a dejected attitude beneath one of the big elms.

"Hey, there, Rattles!" called Emery, coming close

enough to recognize Harry in the twilight. "What are you sulking here for? Why aren't you making merry along with Merriwell's other friends?"

Harry looked at Andy and scowled. The scowl was wasted in the gloom, for Emery did not see it.

"What's the matter with you?" asked Emery, coming closer. "You should be happy to know Merriwell is captain, even if Yale does not stand a show of winning."

"Now, you want to be careful!" growled Harry, fiercely. "I'm in no mood for your jokes! I'll bet you something Yale does win! They can't beat Frank Merriwell!"

"Come off!" laughed Emery. "He's made a chump of himself this time, and everybody knows it."

"That's a lie!" snarled Rattleton. "And I won't stand to have anybody call Frank Merriwell a chump before me!"

Then he let fly his right hand, struck Emery on the chin with his fist, and knocked the fellow down.

The moment Rattleton did this he was sorry. It seemed he did it without thinking.

Emery was dazed and astounded. He had always regarded Rattleton as a peaceable sort of fellow, but now——

"What in blazes do you mean?" he gasped, lifting himself upon his elbow.

In a moment Harry was kneeling beside the fellow he had struck.

"Forgive me, Emery, old man!" he cried, his voice quivering with shame and regret. "I didn't know I was going to do it—honest, I didn't! I did it before I thought! I'm half crazy, anyway! You know I wouldn't do such a thing purposely! Let me help you up!"

"Get out!" said Emery, sharply. "I can get up my-

self. You are not to be trusted! It must be you have been drinking!"

"Not a drop. But I think I am dind of kaffy—I mean, kind of daffy! If I hadn't been—— Say, old man, hit me! I'll take it all right. Soak me a good one! Knock me down!"

Emery was on his feet, and Harry was begging to be struck in turn. Andy looked at him in amazement, and then turned away, gently rubbing the spot where Rattleton's knuckles had struck.

"You are daffy!" Emery flung over his shoulder. "You ought to be in an asylum."

Harry stood still and stared after Emery till he was gone. Then an almost irresistible desire to shed tears assailed the excited fellow, who was completely unstrung.

He hurried to his room and locked himself in, feeling that he never wanted to see anybody again.

Deep down in his heart Harry Rattleton was one of the truest of Frank Merriwell's friends. His affection for Frank was of the most intense nature, and, being somewhat excitable, he had become hysterical over the misfortune he believed had befallen Merry. He would have done anything to keep Frank from walking into the trap. He was proud of Frank's record at Yale, and he felt sure this meant the ruin of the proud reputation Merry had won.

Harry got hungry after a time. He began to realize it, and he became aware of the fact that he had not eaten dinner. Then he decided to go out to a restaurant somewhere and have something all alone by himself. He would be alone in his misery.

He was slinking along the streets like a whipped dog when somebody blocked his path, and a voice cried:

"Here he is, fellows! We won't have to go to his room for him. It's a streak of luck."

Harry's heart gave a thump as he recognized Merri-

well's voice. He looked up, and saw three fellows before him. They were Merry, Hodge and Browning.

"Come," said Frank, locking arms with Harry. "We had started out to have a little feed when I thought of you, and we turned back to get you, if you have not eaten."

At first Harry thought he would lie—thought he would say he had just eaten, so he might get away. But when he tried to say so, the words stuck in his throat. So Merry had thought of him, and they were coming to hunt him up and take him out. He choked, and there was a blurr before his eyes.

"You are very good," he said, weakly, "but——"

"There is no but about it," said Frank, in his hearty, whole-souled manner. "If you have not eaten, you must come along and have a square feed; if you have eaten, you must come along just the same and watch us fill our sacks. Line up, fellows, and close in on him."

Hodge took Rattleton's arm, and Browning fell in behind, lazily observing:

"He's in for it now. Escape is impossible."

So they bore him away to a first-class restaurant, where they had a little private dining room all to themselves, and Merriwell ordered an elaborate spread, and they pitched into the food and ate like the hearty, hungry fellows they were.

As he ate, Harry's heart warmed. Frank was jollier than ever before. He laughed and joked, he told stories that caused the others to shout with laughter. He was the prince of good fellows, that was sure. Still, Harry could not help thinking what a shame it was that he had been trapped.

Hodge was unusually talkative, although his talk was of a serious nature. Browning managed to crack a joke now and then, and he was able to eat and laugh as heartily as anybody.

Not a word did any of them say about Merriwell's new position of responsibility till the meal was over and their appetites satisfied.

Then Browning produced cigarettes and offered them to the others, laughing as he did so.

No one accepted a cigarette.

"I don't suppose anybody will object if I smoke," said Bruce, as he selected one.

"Yes," said Frank, quietly, "I shall object, old man."

With no little surprise, Browning saw Merriwell was in sober earnest.

"Great Scott!" he exclaimed. "Why should you object?"

"I have a very good reason. I may want you before the season is over."

"Want me?" cried Browning. "What for?"

"First base."

"Come off!"

"I am in earnest."

"Why, I am too fat, Frank—I am not in condition. Such a thing is ridiculous!"

"You are large, but you might be fatter than you are. I know you can train down swiftly. A week of hard work will pull you down at an astonishing rate."

Bruce groaned.

"It might; but I should not live through it," he said, as he struck the match and prepared to light the cigarette.

Frank blew out the match and took the cigarette from Browning's fingers.

"I am talking business to you now," he said, almost sternly. "You are going to work systematically to-morrow to work off your flesh, for I may want you on the 'varsity nine. When you are in condition, you are a better man than Parker on first, while Parker is a better man than

Faunce in the field. One trouble with the nine is that several of the men are not playing in their proper positions."

"But you are not going to have the nerve to switch them around! You will not have the crust to fire some of them and take on new men?"

"Won't I? Wait and see. You know I am manager, as well as captain. I considered everything before I told the directors what I would do. They wanted me to be captain, while they retained the management of the nine. I said 'Nit!' I told them that, if I became captain, I must be manager also, and that I must have absolute and thorough control of the team. I must have the authority to do just as I pleased, with nobody to forbid me."

"Good for you!" cried Hodge, while Rattleton brightened up and showed great interest.

"It staggered them at first," smiled Frank. "They thought I had a crust. They tried to induce me to agree to their terms, but I would not. Then they had a fight among themselves, for some were against giving me so much rope. I waited quietly till the smoke of battle cleared away, and then I found they were ready to accept my terms. So I am manager, as well as captain, and I am going to run things just as I please. If I make a fizzle of it, no one else will be to blame."

"That's the stuff!" exclaimed the enthusiastic Hodge.

Harry shook his head, but said nothing.

Frank saw the movement, and quickly asked:

"What's the matter, Rattles? Come, come! You are off your trolley. Everything is all right."

"I'm afraid everything is all wrong," said Rattleton, gravely; "but I warned you, and you went into it with your eyes open."

"Yes, but I went in on my own terms. I'll make an overturning in the nine."

"It's too late for that."

"I don't think so."

"Besides, the material is not here to make a corking nine. You can't make a first-class ball team out of second-class material."

"I believe the material is here," said Merry, quietly; "but I do not think it is all on the nine. I got Hodge on, and now I am going to have Browning."

"Oh, come, Merry!" gasped Bruce. "I'll do almost anything for you, but I can't torture myself to work off flesh in a hurry. Besides, I could not get enough off to——"

"You can get off enough in ten days so you will be able to play ball all right. I want you for your batting. Batters count. You are a good hitter, and the team is weak at the bat. It's no use, Bruce; I want you, and am going to have you. You must quit drinking beer and smoking cigarettes. You must go into training to-morrow, and you must work hard to get off superfluous flesh. One week from Saturday you go on the nine."

It was useless for Browning to beg; Merry had decided, and the big fellow could not get out of it.

"I wouldn't do it for any other man living," declared the lazy student; "but I suppose I'll have to for you. You are a perfect tyrant, anyway. What you say goes."

"And what he says is right," declared the confident Hodge.

"Then I will say right here," spoke Frank, with quiet assurance, "that Yale will have a nine that will be the surprise of the season. We are going after that pennant, and Princeton and Harvard will have to hustle to win."

Hodge nodded. He was thinking of Merriwell's marvelous double-shoot.

"They can't touch it," he muttered.

"Eh?" said Browning. "What's that? Touch what?"

"You'll see," said Hodge, his eyes gleaming. "Frank says the Yale team will be a surprise, but I know what will be a still greater surprise."

CHAPTER XLVI.

PRINCETON'S STARTER.

The opening game of the college league was on. Yale and Princeton were drawn up for the first struggle on the grounds of the latter nine. Yale was in the field, with "Stew" Walbert in the box. The preliminary practice was all over, and the umpire was opening a box to extract a brand new ball.

Haggerty and Merriwell were on the bench in uniform. Browning was on the bench in citizen's clothes. Merriwell showed no signs of nervousness. Browning was placid as a spring morning. Haggerty fidgeted.

Yale was not well represented by "rooters" from New Haven. There was one lonesome little knot huddled on the bleachers, trying to look happy and confident, but making a sad failure of it.

Yale men had stayed away. They felt that their team had no show at all, and they did not have the heart to go down to Princeton and root against a sure thing.

But there was plenty of blue in the grand stand. The young ladies there showed that they admired the boys from Connecticut, and they were not afraid to show their colors.

But the orange and black predominated even there. It seemed to be everywhere. Princeton had a strong team, and men of good judgment were confident she would start off a winner, flukes not taken into consideration.

Walbert was pale as he faced the first Princeton batter. He had seen long Joe Varney before, and he knew the "gangling" left fielder of the "Tigers" was a "lacer."

Walbert took a little time to look over the ground near

his feet. He planted his toe on the rubber plate, and then wound up with an eccentric movement of the arm, and shot in a "twister."

Varney went after the very first one, and got it!

Crack!—and away flew the ball toward right field, while the Princeton lads opened up at the crack of the bat.

"Hurrah! hurrah! Tiger—sis-s-s! boom! ah!"

It was a hit. Everybody saw that in a moment, for Hal Faunce could not gather it in, although he sprinted for it.

Down to first raced Varney. He was an exuberant fellow, and he flapped his long arms, like the wings of a rooster, and crowed hoarsely as he stood on the bag.

That caused another roar to go up. Coachers were on hand, and they began rattling off their talk as soon as the ball was returned to the pitcher.

Walbert tried to grin derisively, but there was a sick expression on his face.

Bruce Browning grunted.

"Another one like that will break his heart, Merriwell," he said. "He may be a good man when things are going his way, but he can't stand grief."

Frank said nothing. He sat there as if taking very little interest in the game, but he was watching Walbert closely.

Beverage, Princeton's short, was the second batter. He laughed as he came to the plate; he laughed in Walbert's face. The Tigers were full of confidence. They had heard all about Yale's weak points, and they were looking for a snap.

Walbert resolved that Beverage should not get a hit off the first ball pitched to him, so he sent him an outcurve that a four-foot bat could not have reached.

The ball was so wide that Hodge had to fling himself after it, and he lost his footing.

A great cry of delight and mingled derision went up.

Varney was scudding down to second, and Hodge was on his knees. But Bart had stopped the ball, and now he turned. Without attempting to get upon his feet, he drew back his arm and sent a liner flying toward second base.

It was possible that every one but Frank Merriwell was surprised by this attempt of the catcher to throw to second while on his knees. A shout of contempt and merriment went up.

That shout turned to one of astonishment, for they saw the ball fly through the air like a bullet, seeming to shoot on a dead line for second. It did not seem that a man could make such a throw while on his knees. It did seem like a miracle.

The coaches were so astounded that they forgot to shout for the runner to slide, and Varney, who had seen Bart fall when he went after the ball, believed there was no need of taking a chance of hurting himself by sliding.

Wintz, Yale's second baseman, came running toward the bag to cut Varney off. He acted as if he expected to take a throw, but Varney laughed aloud.

"Can't fool me that way," he said. "The trick is stale."

But, a moment later he nearly fainted, for something shot before him and struck with a plunk in Wintz's hands. Then the second baseman touched the runner, while Varney was still four feet from the bag.

Varney stopped on second and turned quickly. He was in time to see Wintz snap the ball to Walbert and hear the umpire cry:

"Runner is out!"

Varney was dazed.

"Who threw that ball?" he gasped.

"The man behind the bat, of course," laughed Wintz.

"I know better!" cried Varney. "He couldn't do it! He was down! It passed him. Some outsider threw it in. It is a blocked ball."

But the umpire motioned for him to come in, and it dawned on him after a time that in some marvelous manner the Yale catcher had thrown the ball to second.

Hodge was cheered, and the wearers of the orange and black joined in the ovation he received. The little group of Yale men fairly split their throats howling their delight.

Pooler was one of the party from Yale, but he did not cheer as fiercely as the others. He was disgusted, as well as astonished.

Walt Forrest shouted in Pink's ear:

"That is a feather in Merriwell's cap. Hodge has done good work all along, but that throw was phenomenal. He is bound to become one of the greatest college catchers ever known."

"Rot!" grunted Pooler. "He'll make a fluke sometime that will take the wind out of his sails. He can't keep it up always."

Pooler had not been able to get many bets, as he had wished to bet on Princeton, and everybody else seemed to want to bet the same way. However, he had obtained a few by giving big odds, and all he regretted was that he could not get more.

When Browning saw Hodge throw Varney out at second he lay back with a deep sigh of satisfaction, and it must be confessed that Frank Merriwell breathed easier, for it had seemed that the runner was sure to make the bag safely.

When the shouting was over, Walbert again faced the batter. It seemed that he had gained fresh confidence, for he got two strikes on Beverage right away. Then he tried to "coax" the batter, and soon the score stood three balls and two strikes.

Then Walbert put one over, and Beverage sent it whistling through the Yale short as if nobody was there. It was a two-bagger, and the Tigers howled their delight.

After that, a hit and an error filled the bases. Then Walbert went "up in a balloon," for he could not find the plate, and he forced two runs.

Haggerty had been warmed up before the game began, and now Frank lost no more time in taking Walbert out and putting the little Williams man in his place.

"What's that mean, anyway?" growled one of the Yale rooters. "Why doesn't Merriwell go in? Is he too lazy?"

"He doesn't dare!" declared Pooler. "He knows Princeton is out for blood, and he doesn't want to pitch a losing game."

"I don't believe that!" cried Charlie Creighton. "I don't believe Frank Merriwell is a coward."

"Well, you won't see him pitch to-day, if he can help it."

Haggerty flung his cap on the ground by his side, held the ball up before him with both hands, suddenly jerked it toward him, humped his back in a queer manner, and sent it whistling over the plate.

The batter lined it out. The first ball the little fellow pitched had been met squarely and sent flying toward left field.

The man on third held the bag and watched Joe Costigan get under the ball. Costigan did get under it, waited for it and dropped it!

Then the man on third came scudding home, while the others moved up a bag each, and again the bases were full.

"That is what comes of playing a man out of position," thought Frank. "Costigan is a fine third baseman, but he is no fielder."

But he did not say a word aloud.

Haggerty did his level best, and succeeded in striking out the next man.

The Yale rooters cheered feebly.

The next batter put up a long fly, which Cal Jeffers captured after a hard run, and the first half ended with Princeton "three to the good."

CHAPTER XLVII.

FRANK IN THE BOX.

"That is easy," said Charlie Creighton, hopefully. "Our boys will tie that without a struggle."

But he was mistaken. Nat Finch, the Princeton wonder, did not do a thing but strike out three men in succession, while the great crowd roared its delight.

"That settles it!" said Pooler. "Those are three top-enders, the best batters on the team. If he can make monkeys of them like that, what will he do with the weak batters?"

The rooters were silent. They were discouraged. Not a few of them wished themselves back to New Haven.

Frank was the only one who seemed calm and unruffled. Bart Hodge was pale.

"That fellow Finch is a wizard, Merry!" he huskily exclaimed. "I don't believe anybody else can fool Cal Jeffers like that. Why, Jeffers is a hitter!"

"That's right," nodded Frank, quietly. "But there is a question."

"Eh? What sort of a question?"

"Can Finch hold this up?"

"He has a reputation."

"I don't care. I'll go you something that he slumps before the game is over. He is a strike-out pitcher. He likes to do that trick, as it attracts attention to him. That is what will count against him."

"We don't have one show in a thousand unless you peel off and get into the game."

"That is foolishness."

"Not a bit of it. He has taken the wind out of the fellows."

Frank sent Haggerty into the box again. The little fellow dreaded what was before him, but he went out resolved to do his best.

The first man up got a hit, while the next man got first on balls. Then the two tried a double steal, but Hodge shut the fellow off at third with an easy throw, and Walling came near making it a double by a snap throw to second.

Then another man got a hit, which left a man on first and third, the one on second only getting one base on the hit, as he stumbled and fell when he ran.

"A hit means a score!" roared a voice from the midst of the Princeton rooters.

"It may mean two scores," cried another voice. "Murphy will steal second on the first ball pitched."

Hodge called Haggerty up, and they whispered together, while the Princeton crowd geyed them.

Haggerty sent in a high ball on his next pitch, and Murphy, who was on first, shot toward second.

Hodge made a motion to line the ball down to second, and, as Stubbs was not playing in for a short throw and a return to the plate, the man on third started toward home.

Hodge did not throw to second. With a snap he wheeled toward third, and sent the ball whistling at Walling, who was hugging the bag.

The runner saw the trick, stopped short, and tried to get back to the bag.

Over his shoulder sped the ball, and he saw he was caught between the bases. He tried to dodge back and forth along the line, but Walling ran him down and pinned him.

Two men were out.

Thus far Yale had kept Princeton from scoring on the second inning, but it had not been by work in the box.

Now the men in yellow and black fell on Haggerty fiercely. They hammered him to right, to left, and to center. With two men out, they ran in three more scores in a hurry.

Before the third score was made, Frank Merriwell was out of his sweater and warming up. When the third man crossed the plate, he walked into the diamond, and Haggerty, sick at heart, came out of the box.

Frank was greeted with a cheer. The Yale men cheered him, and Princeton men clapped their hands, for he was well known and admired for his prowess.

His face was quite calm as he went into the box.

Pink Pooler sneered:

"Here is where Mr. Merriwell takes his medicine. Oh, Princeton has won the game now! Yale can't get six scores off a fellow like Finch."

Nobody said a word. All seemed to feel that Pooler was right.

Merry remembered how Billy Mains had paralyzed the Baltimore batter by sending in a double-shoot for the first ball, and he resolved to try it on the Princeton man. Bart signaled for a drop, but Frank gave him a signal that told his decision to use the double-shoot at the very start.

Having taken plenty of time, Merriwell sent in a "smoker." The ball made a sharp outcurve, and then curved inward so quickly that it passed fairly over the outside corner of the plate, although it had looked like a wild one.

"One strike!" cried the umpire.

The batter dropped his stick and stared at Merriwell, while cries of astonishment came from the grand stand.

The face of Bart Hodge was calm and cold as ice, while

his nerves were steady as a clock, although they had been badly shaken till Frank entered the box.

"Have I got 'em?" muttered the batter, as he rubbed his eyes and picked up his bat.

"What's the matter?" sharply asked the captain of the team. "Why did you drop it?"

"You should have seen that ball!" returned the man at the plate. "It had more curves than a corkscrew! I'll bet he can't do it again."

Not a word did Frank say, but again he assumed a position that told Hodge he would pitch a double-shoot.

This time he started it with an in, and it changed to an out, just as the batter leaped back to get out of the way.

Over the outside corner of the plate passed the ball.

"Two strikes!" cried the umpire.

The batter was dazed.

"I'd give a hundred dollars to know what kind of twists he is getting onto that thing!" he muttered. "Never saw anything like that before."

After that he felt that he could not tell where the ball was coming. The next one started with an outcurve, but the batter feared it might twist in somehow, for all that such a thing seemed utterly impossible, so he fanned the empty air trying to hit it, and was out.

Frank had pitched three balls and struck the man out.

"Now, fellows," said Frank, as his men gathered around him near the bench, "if you will keep cool and think you can hit Finch, you will hit him all right before you quit. I am going to try to hold them down hard. If we can make some scores in any possible way, we stand a fair shot at this game yet."

"That's rot!" said Hal Faunce. "We do not stand a ghost of a show. I can't hit Finch, and I don't believe the rest of you can."

Without showing the least excitement, but speaking very coldly, Merry said:

"Faunce, go into the dressing room and get out of that suit. Browning will put it on if he can get into it."

"What?" cried Faunce, harshly. "What do you mean?"

"I do not propose to put a man up against Finch who feels sure he can't hit the fellow. It's a waste of time."

"You are going to lay me off?" growled Faunce.

"Yes," said Frank, and turned away.

Cursing under his breath, Faunce started toward the dressing room. Frank motioned for Browning to follow, and Bruce obeyed.

It happened that Faunce was a big fellow, and the suits were loose, so that there was a chance for Browning to get into the one worn by the angry right fielder.

The game went on.

Bink Stubbs came to the bat and fanned out easily. Then Walling came up and popped an easy fly into the air, so Finch gathered it in and got an out to his credit.

Wintz was the next batter. He did not try to slaughter the ball, but he got up against it fairly, and sent it out toward short. Beverage should have picked it up, but he made a fumble, and Wintz succeeded in reaching first ahead of the ball.

"Here is where we start," said Frank.

But Parker, the next man, batted a liner straight at Murphy, who took it easily.

Still not a hit had been obtained off Finch.

Frank went into the box, prepared to make a fight to keep Princeton from rolling up a score. He could not use his great double-shoot often, but he resolved to use it at critical times. He could control it in a marvelous manner, so it was not dangerous to use.

The first man up managed to find the ball. It was not a hit, but he got first on an error by Wintz.

Then Merry toyed with the next batter, while the anxious runner was held close to first, without daring to try a steal. At last the batter tried to bunt, but Frank apprehended the trick, and ran in the moment he pitched the ball.

Down toward third rolled the ball. Merry got it ahead of Walling, scooping it up with one hand, and turned, throwing it with the same motion that picked it from the ground.

Down to second sped the ball. It got there ahead of the runner, and Wintz snapped it to first quick as a flash.

It was a double play; both men were out.

Then the Yale rooters took heart and cheered. Once more not a few of the Princeton men were generous enough to give a hand.

Frank was not trying to make a brilliant record on strike-outs, but he was holding his opponents down on hits.

The next man up struck out, however, and then Yale once again came to the bat.

For the next three innings the score remained just the same; Princeton had made six, while Yale had not been able to score, although Merriwell, Hodge, Browning, Jeffers and Wintz obtained good hits. Finch, however, was keeping the hits scattered, and the cloud of gloom had settled thickly over the few Yale rooters huddled on the bleachers.

Merriwell was toying with Princeton's best batters. Whenever it looked as if a good man had Merriwell in a hole, he would "put on steam," send in one or two more of those baffling double-shoots, and strike the man out.

The rooters growled. Why hadn't Frank gone in at the start? Then it might have been different. Now the game was lost beyond recovery.

"That shows what a fine manager he is," sneered Pooler.

In the sixth inning Yale seemed in just as bad luck as ever. The first two men up went out, and then Hodge came to the bat. There was fire in Bart's eye. He waited for a good one, and then smashed it out for one of the longest drives of the day, landing on third before the outfielders could get the sphere back into the diamond.

Merriwell was the next batter. He was very particular in the selection of a wagon-tongue bat, and, when he came up, he resolved to bring Bart in if possible.

Finch was shooting them over like bullets. He tried to strike Frank out, and that was where he made his mistake. Merry picked out a good one, found it, met it, and sent it humming.

In came Hodge, while Frank made two bags with ease. The Yale rooters brightened up.

"What's this? What's this?" cried Charlie Creighton. "They have dropped on Finch at last! Now they will hit anything he sends over the plate."

The Yale yell was heard, and the little bunch of rooters did their best to encourage the players.

Finch was astonished by Merriwell's success. Suddenly he lost some of the supreme confidence that had buoyed him up all the while. Yale had scored at a time when a whitewash seemed sure. What was going to happen next?

Cal Jeffers came to the plate. He had been placed at the head of Yale's batting list because of his qualities as a hard, sure hitter.

Hodge and Merriwell had secured hits, and Jeffers looked as if he meant to do the same.

Finch fiddled with the ball, while two Yale coaches shouted from opposite sides of the diamond. He pitched twice and had two called balls on him. Jeffers stood calmly waiting for a good one.

Finch decided to put on his greatest speed and cut the

outside corner of the plate. He did, and Cal Jeffers swung his bat.

It did not seem that Jeffers put any force into that hit, but the ball went skimming down between short and second so fast that no one could touch it, and it placed Jeffers on second, while Merriwell scored with ease.

Two for Yale!

The rooters broke loose in earnest. This was better than they had expected.

And big Bruce Browning was at the bat!

Now Bruce seemed very much awake. He had barely been able to pull on Faunce's suit, and it looked as if he might split open the shirt or the trousers at any moment.

Finch was nervous; he showed it. His confidence had dropped in an astonishing manner.

"It's too bad," said Pink Pooler, who showed some symptoms of uneasiness. "Why didn't the fellows do this before? Now it is too late."

"It's never too late to mend," said Dismal Jones, solemnly. "There is a chance for you."

Finch resolved to worry Browning, but he made a mistake with the first ball he pitched. Without intending to do so, he sent that ball over close to the ground.

Browning hit it, and rapped out a daisy-cutter that enabled him to get first, while Jeffers, by the most brilliant running, crossed third and came home on a slide, getting in the score.

"There's half of it!" screamed Jack Diamond, from the bleachers.

His voice was drowned by the Yale cheers.

Right there Finch went entirely to pieces. He became so wild that the next two men got a base on balls, and the bags were all taken. Then Walling rapped one to Princeton's third baseman. It should have been an easy out, but the man was so anxious to pick it up cleanly that he jug-

gled it, tossed it into the air, caught it, threw it to first, and put it away over the head of the baseman.

Browning had scored, Costigan followed him, and Bink Stubbs made a slide for third.

The right fielder was the man who got the ball. He shot it to first, and first sent it across to third. It was another wild throw. The whole Princeton nine seemed "up in the air."

Stubbs scrambled up, hearing the coacher yelling for him to make for home. He did so. His short legs fairly twinkled as he tore down the line, and he crossed the plate ahead of the ball.

Then the Yale rooters yelled, and shrieked, and cheered till it seemed they were crazy, for the score was tied!

CHAPTER XLVIII.

VICTORY!

Another pitcher was set to warming up right away, although it was as much the fault of the infield players as of Finch that Yale had tied the score. Finch saw the man getting ready to go in, and that helped take the sand out of the fellow. He gave the next batter a base on balls, and then Parker got a hit that brought Walling home and gave Yale the lead.

It was a happy crowd of rooters who wore the blue just then. A few minutes before it had seemed that Yale did not have a show in the game. At the beginning of the inning Yale had not scored, and Princeton apparently had a snap. Now Yale was one score in the lead.

The students from New Haven acted like maniacs. They howled like so many savages, they sung, they thumped each other, they laughed and shrieked.

There was one who did not shout. It was Pooler. He looked very ill.

"Too bad!" he grated. "Is it possible Merriwell and Hodge are going to be the cause of beating me again! Oh, Merriwell is poison to me! His man, Hodge, started the ball rolling, and he followed it up. Then those Princeton puppies acted like a lot of children! It's awful!"

He wiped the cold sweat from his face.

"Here's to good old Yale, drink it down!" sang the rooters.

Finch dallied for time. He wanted to get out of the box, for something told him Yale would keep right on piling up scores while he remained in.

The Princeton captain sent out a new pitcher, and Finch dropped the ball willingly.

The new man pitched a very slow ball. It was a great change from the speed of Finch, and the batter popped up an easy fly to the infield, which retired Yale at last.

But the rooters were jubilant, and the players were hopeful.

"Now, fellows," said Frank, as the men went out into the field, "we must be steady and hold them down. If we can do it, this game belongs to us."

But it did not take him long to discover that the men were too anxious. Walling let an easy hit go through him, and the batter reached first. Stubbs dropped a hot bouncer, and two men were on bases. Wintz made a wild throw to third, and the bases were filled without Princeton having made a hit.

The Princeton rooters were warming up.

They were doing their best to rattle Merriwell.

Frank did not believe in working for strike-outs, but he began to realize that the time had come when strike-outs counted. He trimmed the next batter's whiskers with an in, he pulled him with an out, and he paralyzed him with a double-shoot.

"Three strikes—batter out," decided the umpire.

"Got to do it twice more," thought Merry, while Hodge nodded at him encouragingly.

He did. With astonishing ease, apparently, he made the next two men fan, and Princeton had not scored.

Yale held the lead.

As Frank came in to the bench, Hodge met him and said:

"It was beautiful work, Merry! It was grand! Keep it up. You must win this game in the box. The team can't be trusted."

"I will do my best," said Frank, quietly.

He did. Although Yale was unable to make another score, Frank held Princeton down so she could not recover her lead, although she filled the bases in the ninth, and made a desperate bid for a score. For the last time in the game, Merry used the double-shoot, and the last Princeton man fanned gracefully.

It was all over but the shouting. Yale had won, and the little crowd of loyal rooters were weak from their vocal efforts, but happy—so happy!

Without doubt, the most wretched man in New Jersey that day was Pink Pooler. He hated Frank Merriwell, he hated himself, he hated everybody and everything. The victorious shouts of the Yale men made him sick at heart, and he slunk away by himself.

The news was sent to New Haven by wire. The score had been sent out by innings, and at the end of the fifth inning, with the score six to nothing in Princeton's favor, a deep cloud of gloom hung over the Yale campus. The only hope of the most hopeful was that Yale would manage to get in one run and save a shutout.

When the result of the next inning came in everyone seemed paralyzed with astonishment. They could not believe the defenders of the blue had made seven runs in a single inning. It seemed utterly ridiculous. They thought it was a hoax. Some bets were made that it was not right.

And, when the game continued and ended, and they knew for a certainty that Yale had won, there was a wild scene on the Yale campus. To snatch victory from defeat in such a manner was enough to set the Yale men wild.

"Where is Finch?" was the cry. "Oh, he had his troubles in the sixth! Our boys didn't do a thing to him!"

It was a remarkable game; the score board told that. A hundred fellows said they would have given anything had they seen it. They were regretful when they thought

how they had remained away because they thought Yale did not have a chance to win.

Everybody talked baseball, and Frank Merriwell's name was on everybody's tongue. It was generally believed that he was responsible for the marvelous manner in which Yale had won.

"You may bet your life he did most of the pitching," chuckled Paul Pierson. "Princeton did not score after the second inning. I'll bet something Merriwell pitched the last seven innings of that game."

It was a happy crowd of players and rooters who took the train for New York that night. Some Princeton men came down and saw them off.

"It's all right, fellows," called the Tigers. "You won by a fluke. Next time Finch will paralyze you. He is a dandy!"

"What's the matter with Merriwell?" cried Charlie Creighton. "You did not make a score off him. How do you like that delirium tremens curve of his?"

"It's a bird!" was the answer; "but we'll eat it next time."

"Oh, I don't know! Finch is a dandy, but what's the matter with Merriwell?"

"He's all right!" shouted the jolly lads on the railway station.

"You bet he is!" flung back the Yale men on the train. "Three cheers for Merriwell!"

"Hurrah! hurrah! hurrah!"

Then the train drew out of the station.

It was one of those glorious hours that comes to every college lad who admires the manly game of baseball. And it seems remarkable that any live American boy with warm blood in his body can fail to love the game with all his soul.

CHAPTER XLIX.

FIGHTING A GANG.

"Merriwell won the game."

That was the report brought back to New Haven by the victors, and Frank was more of a hero than ever.

There was one man who came back with a heart overflowing with bitterness. Pink Pooler had made bets right and left that Yale would not win the pennant that season. He had offered all sorts of odds, and he felt that he would be in a bad hole if Yale did win.

Yale played Harvard on Yale field to follow the Princeton game. Now that the blue had won over the orange and black there were enough fellows with money to bet that Yale would down Harvard.

Pooler had received a "straight tip" that Harvard was coming with a powerful team, and he raked every dollar he could raise to back her as a winner.

Pooler firmly believed Yale had won the Princeton game by a fluke. Harvard must come out ahead in the game on the following Saturday. If not by fair means—well, there would be a way to fix it!

Much talk was made about Merriwell's double-shoot. Hodge was enthusiastic over it. He declared Merry would paralyze the Harvard men with that curve.

Frank retired Hal Faunce from the team. He put Puss Parker in right, and placed Bruce Browning on first. Then he pulled in Joe Costigan from left field and restored him to third base, the position he had played the previous season.

"Who will he play in left?"

That was an open question. He practiced with both

Gamp and Walling in that position. Walling showed up poorly, while Gamp, tall, "gangling" and awkward, made some remarkable catches. Walling was placed on the bench, and Gamp was installed in left.

Old players looked on aghast. Surely Merriwell was crazy. Gamp was not a practical man. Browning might go to sleep on first. What sort of a team was Frank getting together?

Merry did not pay any heed to what was being said. He took his team out for practice every day. He worked them hard. He drilled them on team work. He had them so everyone understood the code of signals which he introduced.

Pooler went out day after day to see them practice. He was deeply interested, and not a few fellows believed his interest came from patriotic motives.

He was sizing up the nine, and, as the day for the game with Harvard approached, he became more and more nervous.

"I can't lose this time!" he thought. "It will ruin me! Merriwell is the moving spirit of the whole team. With him out of the way, Harvard would have a walk-over."

With him out of the way!

That thought kept running in Pink's head. How could Merriwell be disposed of so he could take no part in the game against Harvard?

Pooler fell to scheming. He formed plan after plan, but discarded them all. He thought of trying to drug Frank on the field, but that had been tried too many times. It was dangerous, and it might not prove successful.

"No," he decided, "I will see that he is cooked in advance."

He went into town, and was seen talking with some lads who seemed rather disreputable in appearance.

Friday came. Among the first to reach the park for

practice was Merriwell and Hodge. Frank was going to pitch to Bart a while before all the team assembled on the field.

It happened that Bart and Costigan were the first to get out of the dressing room, and Frank was left putting on his shoes. He finished his task, and rose to his feet. As he did so, the door opened and a rough-looking chap dodged in.

"Hello!" exclaimed Frank, in surprise. "Who are you, and what are you doing here?"

The fellow caught up a bat and swung it aloft.

"Shut up!" he hissed. "If you holler, I'll split your head open!"

Then he gave a sharp whistle.

Frank knew that whistle was a signal, and he instantly realized crooked work was a-foot. With his eyes he measured the distance to the intruder. An instant later, he made a catlike spring, caught hold of the bat, twisted it from the fellow's hand, and had him by the collar.

"You infernal sneak!" he cried. "What is your game? I am onto you!"

The door came open with a bang.

"Come on, fellers!" cried the first fellow to enter. "We's got him all alone! We kin fix him!"

Five or six young ruffians started to swarm in at the door. They had heavy sticks, and it was plain they meant to do Merriwell harm.

The one Frank had by the collar tried to give him a swinging blow, but, quick as a flash, Merriwell caught him up and flung him straight at the gang in the doorway!

The human catapult struck the foremost of the ruffians and nearly swept them off their feet. Before they could recover, Merry caught up the bat and charged them.

Mercilessly he belabored them over the shoulders. Once or twice he cracked one on the head.

They howled with terror and disgust, and Frank soon drove them from the dressing room. He slammed the door, barred it, and held them out successfully till some of the other players arrived on the field and came to his rescue.

The gang, seeing they had been baffled in their attempt, lost little time in getting away.

"I'd give something to know who put them up to the job," said Frank. "I am sure they were hired to do me up. If I had not tumbled and acted in a hurry, they would have done it all right."

Hodge was indignant.

"I'll wager something I can tell just who put them up to the game," he said.

"Name him."

"Pink Pooler."

"What makes you think so?"

"Pooler hates you. He bet me fifty dollars Yale would lose the game with Princeton. I beat him at that, and I know that was not all the money he had on the game. He has put up everything he could rake that Yale will not win the pennant. If Yale wins, Pooler is ruined. If he didn't hire that gang to do you up, I don't know."

"I hate to think it of him, but I remember now that he did stand in with some of my enemies who have been driven to leave college. I'll keep my eyes open for him in the future."

"You won't make a mistake if you do."

The story of the attempt to knock out Merriwell caused no small excitement, for Frank had hundreds of friends, and all Yale seemed to look to him as the Moses who might lead them out of the wilderness.

The time of the game with Harvard rolled round at last, and the boys from Cambridge came down in force. Rooters with powerful lungs and tin horns galore were on hand.

Yale was at home, and she was stuffed full of courage, for all of the queer team Frank had got together.

Yale started off like winners, making two scores in the first. But, not to be outdone, Harvard managed to get in two on two scratch hits and as many errors.

Then both pitchers settled down, and not another score was made for six innings.

In the seventh Harvard scored. In the eighth Yale tied her. In the ninth Yale got another and took the lead.

Then was the time for Frank Merriwell to show the timber he was made of, and he did so. Then it was that his double-shoot came into use, and won the game by fooling three of Harvard's best batters so they all struck out.

Yale had won the first two games of the series with Princeton and Harvard, and was fairly on the road to the pennant.

Pink Pooler felt like murdering Frank Merriwell. He took no part in the jollification that night, but kept at a distance, listening with burning heart to the songs and cheers of the hilarious students.

That night he realized that he was a traitor in every sense of the word, and he was more bitter at heart than ever before.

"Frank Merriwell is responsible for it all," he kept declaring. "He has the greatest luck! Sometime he will have the luck to get it in the neck. Those fellows made a failure of the attempt to knock him out before the game, but they got away with my money, for they would not attempt the job unless I paid in advance."

Although Frank knew he had enemies in Yale, he was not aware there was one quite so desperate and dangerous as Pink Pooler.

And, despite all his enemies, with the aid of his double-shoot, he succeeded in piloting the Yale team to victory that season. The feat stands on record as most remark-

able, for it was generally acknowledged that never had Yale put a poorer team in the field at the opening of the season.

It was generally agreed that she won almost all of her games in the box.

THE END.

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